



# HEGEL AND THE SYMBOLIC MEDIATION OF SPIRIT

KATHLEEN DOW MAGNUS

*Foreword by Stephen Houlgate*

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and the Symbolic

Mediation of Spirit



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*To my parents,  
Joann Gaffney Dow (d.1987)  
and  
Robert F. Dow, Jr.,  
who have shown me the power of spirit  
that is born of endurance.*



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## Foreword

For Hegel, the institutions of the modern world have arisen as a result of the growing understanding that we are essentially free, self-determining beings. For many post-Hegelian writers, by contrast, self-determination is ultimately an illusion: we imagine that we are quite free, but our activity is always conditioned by material factors—such as gender, the environment, or the system of economic relations—that we can never successfully disavow. One of the subtlest of these post-Hegelians is Jacques Derrida, who argues that our conception of our own freedom presupposes, amongst other things, the specific materiality of the linguistic sign. According to Derrida, signs—such as sounds and letters—work by seeming to erase themselves and thereby let the meaning to which they refer come to mind unalloyed. Signs thus appear to us to be the transparent medium through which meaning becomes visible in its purity. At the same time, however, signs retain an irreducible material quality—a pitch or a shape on the page—whose multiple associations constantly threaten to disrupt the meaning to be conveyed and to render it unstable or undecidable. We use linguistic signs to articulate the idea that we are free and autonomous; but our reliance on such signs belies the very freedom to which we lay claim. If Derrida is right, the modern world is thus not so much the epoch in which we recognize that we are free, but rather one in which we are required to acknowledge our indebtedness to the manifold material conditions of any “freedom” we think we enjoy.

There have been two principal responses to Derrida's intervention. On the one hand, many have agreed that the modern idea of self-determination—especially that championed by Hegel—is indeed an illusion. On the other hand, many have simply rejected Derrida's arguments outright in the name of freedom. So far, however, few defenders of the idea of freedom and of Hegel's concept of self-determination in particular, have seen in Derrida's writings the occasion to deepen our understanding of what true self-determination itself entails. The strength and originality of Kathleen Dow Magnus' work is that she sees Derrida's texts as providing just such an occasion. Dr. Magnus does not accept the Derridean view that every idea of self-determination is irredeemably problematic; nor does she simply dismiss Derrida's claims out of hand. She offers, rather, a subtle Hegelian *response* to Derrida by arguing that free self-determination is, indeed, possible but that, for Hegel, such self-determination itself incorporates a certain indebtedness to materiality, sensuousness and the work of the imagination.

Dr. Magnus develops her persuasive thesis by focussing on a topic that has been largely neglected in the secondary literature: Hegel's account of the *symbol* and *symbolic expression*. Much work has been devoted in the past to Hegel's theory of language, but all too often attention has been directed to Hegel's view of the sign, rather than the symbol more generally. Dr. Magnus insists, however, that, if we are to appreciate the extent to which self-determination entails an indebtedness to that which is irreducibly material or sensuous, we must highlight above all the role that symbols play in mediating our self-understanding: for, unlike signs, symbols do not erase (or appear to erase) themselves in the expression of meaning, but remain stubbornly present in their very sensuousness, even as they point beyond themselves to their meaning. In my view, Dr. Magnus offers us the most comprehensive—and intelligent—discussion in English to date of Hegel's view of the symbol. Symbols are subtly distinguished from intuitions, representations, signs and thoughts, as well as from metaphors and allegories; attention is drawn in a novel way to the symbolic character

not just of Symbolic art in the narrow sense, but also of art as a whole, as well as religion; and philosophy is shown both to be distinct from *and* to presuppose the symbolic. Readers of this excellent book will be left in no doubt that, far from denigrating symbols in favor of more "transparent" signs, Hegel accords a prominent and irreducible role to all forms of symbolic expression. It may well be that truth finds its most complete articulation in the abstract medium of philosophical thought that dispenses with symbols; but it is equally the case that our spiritual life comprises much more than pure thought alone and that (whether we acknowledge the fact or not) our imagination and emotions need to be continually nourished by aesthetic and religious symbolism.

One of Dr. Magnus' most original insights is that symbols also afford us the distinctive experience of knowing ourselves *not* knowing ourselves completely. Symbols fail to make their meaning utterly clear, and at the same time (as Derrida is well aware) they bring with them associations that extend beyond the meaning they half-reveal. Such lack of clarity and excess of association, Dr. Magnus argues, prevents the symbol from conveying its meaning unambiguously. In this sense, she maintains, we do not know fully or clearly who we are, when we know ourselves symbolically. Yet why should it be important for spirit, which seeks absolute knowledge of itself, to *fail* to know itself completely? Dr. Magnus' answer captures perfectly the core of Hegel's thought: only in so far as it finds itself and knows itself in and through the experience of losing itself and not knowing itself, can spirit's knowledge of itself be *absolute* and *comprehensive*. Without this moment of losing oneself—or of not yet having found oneself—in symbols, spirit would lack one crucial dimension of human experience to which many post-Hegelian thinkers rightly draw attention: the awareness of oneself as divided from or other than oneself. Spirit would thus have a clear and transparent understanding of itself that is quite *one-sided*.

The profound and refreshing insight running throughout Dr. Magnus' book is that spirit knows itself as hidden from itself and lost to itself in *symbolic* self-understanding

above all. Such self-understanding does not prevent spirit from becoming whole and free, but is precisely what enables it to understand itself, and so to determine itself, fully. Thanks are due to Dr. Magnus for making this point so clearly and imaginatively, and for showing us a Hegel who continues to be deeply relevant to both the modern and the postmodern worlds.

Stephen Houlgate

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First of all, I would like to thank Stephen Houlgate of the University of Warwick. His unsurpassed knowledge of the Hegelian corpus inspired my interest in Hegel and his philosophical vision and enthusiasm helped me to pursue it. I am especially grateful to Stephen for his patient willingness to read and discuss numerous drafts of each chapter, and for his lengthy and careful criticisms of them. His conscientious direction and his encouragement at every stage of this work has been indispensable to its completion and has contributed significantly to its final formation.

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## A Note on the Textual Sources

Much of this study of Hegel has been based upon material from Hegel's lectures on the philosophy of spirit, the philosophy of art, and the philosophy of religion. In each case particular difficulties arise with regard to authenticity. In the case of his *Philosophy of Spirit* (*Philosophie des Geistes*), the third section of his *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences* (*Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften*) there exist, in addition to the relatively concise manuscript written by Hegel, various notes from students who heard his lectures. My analysis draws primarily from Hegel's own outline, which reached its final form in 1830 and which serves as the basis of Moldenhauer and Michel's edition (*Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften III*, herausgegeben von Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel [Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970, 1992]) as well as the M. J. Petry bilingual edition, *Hegel's Philosophy of Subjective Spirit* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1978). However, since Hegel's lectures were much more detailed than the written text, and since Hegel himself insisted upon the necessity of his written outlines being expanded upon verbally (see Moldenhauer and Michel's editorial notes, p. 423), I believe the student notes are worth taking seriously. For this reason, I have also considered the student "additions" or "*Zusätze*" originally compiled by Ludwig Boumann in 1845 (now to be found in the Suhrkamp edition), Petry's incorporation of the 1825 Griesheim and Kehler notes into the Boumann *Zusätze*, and the more recently edited version based upon the notes of Johann Eduard Erdmann und Ferdinand Walter (*Vorlesungen*

*über die Philosophie des Geistes, Berlin 1827/1828, Nachgeschrieben von Johann Eduard Erdmann und Ferdinand Walter*, hrsg. von Franz Hespe und Burkhard Tuschling [Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1994]).

The case is more difficult with regard to Hegel's lectures on aesthetics, for there exists no text written by Hegel himself, but only notes from students who heard his various lectures. My work draws heavily from the Suhrkamp edition, which is based upon Hegel's student Hotho's notes compiled in 1835 and reworked in 1842 (G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, hrsg. von Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel [Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970, 1990]), but I have also taken into consideration the relatively recent editions of various lecture notes: *Vorlesung über Ästhetik, Berlin 1820/21*, hrsg. von Helmut Schneider (Frankfurt: Peter Lang Verlag, 1995), based upon the manuscripts of Ascheberg, Terberg, and Middendorf, as well as *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Kunst, Berlin 1823, Nachgeschrieben von Heinrich Gustav Hotho*, hrsg. von Annemarie Gethmann Siefert (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1998).

With regard to Hegel's lectures on the philosophy of religion, I have relied primarily upon the recently edited *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, hrsg. von Walter Jaeschke (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1993–95), which represents the most complete compilation of student notes on this series of lectures, though I have included occasional references to the Suhrkamp edition as well. Where discrepancies arise among the various lecture series, I draw from the 1827 lectures, the last lectures on the philosophy of religion from which there exists a complete set of student notes.

This study rests on the shoulders of scholars of the Hegel Archive whose editing of Hegelian manuscripts represents several lifetimes of work. My consideration of all the most recent and well-reputed textual editions has allowed me to present the most accurate picture of Hegel's philosophy possible to date.

I have considered the question of the development of Hegel's thought only when it pertains directly to my thesis.

All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

## Abbreviations of Hegelian Texts Cited

“ENZ I,” “ENZ II,” “ENZ III” = *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften*. Herausgegeben von Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970, 1992.

“Phil SS” = M. J. Petry, ed. *Hegel’s Philosophy of Subjective Spirit*. (Bilingual edition). Dordrecht: Reidel, 1978.

“Phil G” = *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie des Geistes. Berlin 1827/1828. Nachgeschrieben von Johann Eduard Erdmann und Ferdinand Walter*. Hrsg. von Franz Hespe und Burkhard Tuschling. Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1994.

“Ä I,” “Ä II,” “Ä III” = *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*. Hrsg. von Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970, 1990.

“VÄ 1820/21” = *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik. Berlin 1820/21*. Hrsg. von Helmut Schneider. Frankfurt: Peter Lang Verlag, 1995.

“VPK 1823” = *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Kunst. Berlin 1823. Nachgeschrieben von Heinrich Gustav Hotho*. Hrsg. von Annemarie Gethmann Siefert. Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1998.

“VPR I-m,” “VPR II-m,” “VPR III-m” = *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*. Hrsg. von Walter Jaeschke. Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1993–95.

“VPR I-s,” “VPR II-s” = *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*. Hrsg. von Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970, 1991.

"PG" = *Phänomenologie des Geistes*. Hrsg. von Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970, 1991.

"BS" = *Berliner Schriften, 1818–1831*. Hrsg. von Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970, 1986.

"GPR" = *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*. Hrsg. von Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970, 1989.

"NHS" = *Nürnberger und Heidelberger Schriften, 1808–1817*. Hrsg. von Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970, 1993.

"VPG" = *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*. Hrsg. von Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970, 1992.

"VGP I," "VGP II," "VGP III" = *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*. Hrsg. von Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970, 1986.

"WL I, WL II" = *Wissenschaft der Logik*. Hrsg. von Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970, 1993.

English translations cited:

*Hegel's Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art. Volumes I and II*. Trans. T. M. Knox. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975, reprinted in 1991.

*Introduction to the Lectures of the History of Philosophy*. Trans. T. M. Knox and A.V. Miller. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985.

*Lectures on the History of Philosophy*. 3 vols. Trans. E. S. Haldane and F. H. Simpson. Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1966.

# Introduction

## I. Derrida's Provocation

At the end of a well-known analysis of Hegel's theory of signs, Jacques Derrida raises a question that challenges the whole of Hegelian thought. Derrida asks whether spirit (*Geist*)<sup>1</sup>—in the midst of its night—can be assured of its self-recuperation: “. . . at the moment when meaning is lost, when thought is opposed to its other, when spirit is absent from itself, is the result of the operation certain?”<sup>2</sup> In other words: during the time that spirit is alienated from itself, does it know that it will find itself again? By asking this question Derrida highlights spirit's moment of self-estrangement and so casts doubt upon Hegel's claim that spirit determines itself completely. He thus provokes further questions: How does spirit fully determine itself when part of this determination occurs through a period of self-loss? How can spirit continue to determine itself during the time in which it is alienated from itself and thus from its very capacity for determination? Does not this situation amount to spirit knowing itself when it specifically is *not* its self-knowing self; i.e., to thought-thinking-itself-*not*-thinking? Moreover, if spirit does determine itself during the time of its self-alienation, how can it be said that it ever *really* suffers such alienation? Would not spirit's continued ability to determine itself in its own absence render that absence a mere illusion?

According to Derrida, Hegel can explain this paradox of spirit only by recourse to the concept of the sign (P&P, p. 74). In Hegel's system the sign serves as the means by which

spirit returns to itself after its period of alienation: spirit finds itself by sending signs of itself to itself. The sign serves, in other words, as the conceptual construct by which spirit overcomes its period of estrangement and recovers its losses. However, as Derrida points out, the sign functions as a sign—indeed *is* a sign—only by virtue of spirit’s retrospective or recollective determining of it as a dispensable, merely formal transition. The sign is a sign only in so far as it lets its positive value be discounted for the sake of spirit’s self-determination. The particular content of an intuition or image does not belong to the sign *qua* sign. As Hegel explains, “In so far as the intuition . . . is used as a sign, it contains the essential determination of being only as superseded” (*Die Anschauung . . . erhält, insofern sie zu einem Zeichen gebraucht wird, die wesentliche Bestimmung, nur als aufgehobene zu sein*) (*ENZ III*, §459).<sup>3</sup> Like a surgical stitch that dissolves into the tissue it sews together, the sign is the vanishing means of spirit—the “bridge” spirit “lifts” as it crosses (P&P, p. 72). By thus discounting the otherness that mediates it, spirit conceives of itself as thoroughly self-determining and posits the sign as nothing other than its *own* mediation.

Nevertheless, as Derrida suggests, this explanation only shifts the question of spirit’s complete self-determination to questions regarding the viability of the sign’s transparent mediation. How exactly does spirit manage to determine the medium of its self-retrieval to be nothing but its own? Does spirit simply wipe out the positivity of the intuitions that give rise to its signs? Or does it create the sign *qua* sign *ex nihilo*? During the period of its self-estrangement, in the course of its subjective theoretical development, spirit receives intuitions which, Hegel says, do not have the status of real existence. Spirit then transforms these intuitions into images, symbols, and—after several repetitions of conventional associations—signs. At this point, according to Hegel, spirit “no longer needs” the original intuitions (*ENZ III*, §457). However, it seems that if spirit determines itself completely, it must determine itself without *ever* having needed the original intuitions. But how can spirit do this? How can spirit claim that the intuitions are not real when it relies

upon them for its own mediation? How, in other words, can spirit deny the medium of its self-retrieval and nullify the time of its self-realization? Or, to ask the question in a manner more sympathetic to Hegel's claims: what would "whole" and "self-determining" *have to mean* in order for them to be attributable to a spirit that suffers a true alienation and undergoes a real self-loss? How can there be such a spirit, and what does it have to do with human beings?

In what follows, my interpretation of Hegel will respond to these questions by focusing on the role of *the symbol* and *the sign* in Hegel's philosophy of spiritual self-determination. Accordingly, in distinction from Derrida's line of analysis in "The Pit and the Pyramid," which focuses on the role of the sign in subjective theoretical spirit's self-identification, this work aims to demonstrate the critical role of *the symbol* as well—not only in spirit's theoretical self-determination, but also in the three "absolute" domains of art, religion, and philosophy. Although spirit's necessary recourse to the symbolic—to that which is ambiguous and displacing—appears to compromise its act of self-determination, my analysis aims to show how spirit's symbolic experience actually *conditions* and *completes* its self-determining activity. Besides leading to a unique view of spirit, this focus on Hegel's discussions of the symbol aims to contribute to some of the most important debates in Hegelian scholarship. This study serves, for example, to delineate the role of language in Hegel's philosophy, to illuminate the paradox of art's simultaneous absolute and derivative status, and to display philosophy's dependence upon artistic and religious conceptions of reality. Ultimately, however, this work proposes to show how Hegel's notion of spirit remains relevant to the contemporary human situation even in light of the serious and pressing objections of postmodern philosophy.

To see just how pressing these objections are, we must examine them in a bit more detail. Since a comprehensive presentation of the postmodern position is beyond the scope of this project (and in principle impossible), we will limit our discussion on this point to Derrida's reading of Hegel. There



are several reasons for doing so. Not only is Derrida among the most influential philosophers of postmodernism, but he has engaged the work of Hegel most thoroughly, carefully, and effectively. Resisting the temptation to dismiss Hegel too quickly, Derrida has approached the complexity of Hegelian philosophy with respect, even as he has made it the object of severe criticism. Indeed, if Hegel's rational philosophy epitomizes the modern view, Derrida's philosophical practice could be said to exemplify the postmodern position (were it not for the fact that his discourse questions the very possibility of such exemplification). Derrida's reading of Hegel thus represents a powerful encounter between modern and postmodern perspectives.

This work will focus on a single aspect of this multidimensional encounter. Let me be clear that the intention here is not to compare the two thinkers as such, but rather to offer an interpretation of Hegel's notion of spirit occasioned by Derrida's reading of Hegel on the sign and the symbol. Consequently, the presentation of Derrida's thought will be merely schematic. Since the main task is to develop an interpretation of Hegel's notion of spirit, Derrida's philosophy will be discussed only insofar as it pertains to that interpretation. Specifically, we will be concerned with two loci of Derrida's deconstructive intervention: his analyses of the sign in Hegel's *Philosophy of Spirit* (*Philosophie des Geistes*), the third section of his *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, and his discussion of metaphor and philosophy, which treats a section of Hegel's *Aesthetics* (*Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*). As we shall see, Derrida uses these deconstructive motifs—metaphor and sign—to interrogate Hegel's basic notion of spirit and to suggest that the capacity for complete self-determination Hegel attributes to it is but a metaphysical dream.

#### *A. Metaphor and Philosophy*

An important way in which Derrida questions the claims of metaphysics (that is to say, traditional philosophy) is through an analysis of the concept of "metaphor." In his

essay "White Mythology" he takes this concept as his main theme and considers its place in Western philosophy.<sup>4</sup> Observing that Aristotle's definition has been decisive for the tradition of metaphysics, he understands the concept of metaphor as referring to a transference of meaning based upon some resemblance, and he suggests that it is justified to consider metaphor in this general sense as including the symbolical forms of figure, myth, fable, and allegory (WM, pp. 231, 215).<sup>5</sup>

Although he does not focus exclusively on Hegel, Derrida sees Hegel's philosophy as offering the most "explicit" elaboration of the system of oppositions which govern metaphysics's use of metaphor and which condition its process of idealization (WM, p. 226). Indeed, according to Derrida, "the movement of metaphorization . . . is nothing other than a movement of idealization" (WM, p. 226). Hegel, he says, accomplishes this movement through "the master category of dialectical idealism, to wit, the *relève* (*Aufhebung*). . . ." (WM, p. 226). In other words, Hegel's spirit progresses toward its complete self-determination through a series of metaphorical transferences. What this means is that metaphysics in general and Hegel's "spirit" in particular can assert their primacy only by designating themselves as "lifted" above the sensuous domain. Spirit can assert itself only by opposing itself to nature and assuming a whole system of corresponding oppositions (nature/history, nature/freedom, sensual/spiritual, sensible/intelligible, sensory/sense [*sinnlich/Sinn*], etc.) (WM, p. 226). But, according to Derrida, these oppositions are based upon a false, unacknowledged presupposition: they deny the important sense in which the spiritual, intellectual, and metaphysical are necessarily *grounded* in the natural, material, and physical. Spirit's self-distinction from nature therefore is in Derrida's view an artificial construct based upon a fundamental denial of the natural. Spirit can claim itself to be wholly self-determining only because it is blind to its dependency upon what it mistakenly designates as "its" other. Anxious to raise itself above that which is merely "immediate," spirit dismisses the natural as a merely "negative" aspect of itself.

But as Derrida contends, this unfounded move characterizes metaphysical idealism and even defines it as such. In order to establish itself as bearing more truth than the natural, material, and physical, metaphysics discounts the reality of this domain. In the very process, however, metaphysics fails to realize what it is doing and what it loses as a result. In and through the movement of idealization, it cuts itself off from its own roots. Worse still, it refuses to acknowledge this extraction, denies its own subsequent lack and naively assumes its own coherence and completion.

In order to make his case, Derrida uses several strategies. First of all, he employs a number of metaphysical concepts throughout his essay (such as “sensible,” “figure,” “rhetorical flowering,” “ground,” and “field”) in such a way as to highlight their physical basis even as they work to produce supra-physical meaning. At the same time, he employs certain metaphors of *the concept* of metaphor and of the process of metaphorization. At the beginning of *White Mythology* both strategies coincide with his introduction of the notion of “*usure*.” This French word bears the double implications of “usury” and “using up” and thus condenses a paradox Derrida sees as intrinsic to the philosophical concept of metaphor (WM, pp. 209–10). As he explains, “Abstract notions always hide a sensory figure” (WM, p. 210): philosophy can invest its metaphors with meaning only by effacing an underlying sensory image. In other words, philosophy works in and through an exchange of sensory images for abstract meaning. Indeed, as Derrida points out, he too must use metaphor in his critique of the concept of metaphor: “How can we make this *sensible* except by metaphor? which is here the word *usure*” (WM, p. 209). Theoretical discourse, he maintains, always borrows from the sensory field: “In effect there is no access to the uses of a linguistic phenomenon without giving it some figurative representation” (WM, p. 209).

Derrida criticizes metaphysics, then, not for its use of metaphor or its dependence upon sensory figures, but for its denial of the implications of this use and dependence. Through a reading of Anatole France’s critique of the philo-

sophical concept of metaphor, he suggests that even when philosophy acknowledges that its metaphoric roots lie outside its own domain, it usually denies the consequences of this fact. Instead philosophy tends to make two faulty assumptions: 1) that it could recover and determine the "original value" or meaning of the underlying sensuous image; and 2) that its metaphysical meaning contains more truth than the underlying physical presentation (WM, pp. 210–11). In Derrida's view, however, both of these assumptions presume a philosophical dominance over the sensory domain, when in fact the metaphor's "original" meaning actually *exceeds* the philosophical domain. Metaphors, Derrida emphasizes, enter the field of philosophical meaning only when the underlying sensory meaning is forgotten: "The primitive meaning, the original, and always sensory and material, figure . . . is not exactly a metaphor. It is a kind of transparent figure, equivalent to a literal meaning (*sens propre*). It becomes a metaphor when philosophical discourse puts it into circulation" (WM, pp. 211). In this process philosophy disregards not only the sensuous element, but also its own act of transference: "Simultaneously the first meaning and the first displacement are then forgotten. The metaphor is no longer noticed and it is taken for the proper meaning. A double effacement" (WM, p. 211). In its use of metaphor philosophy assumes to know the ground of its own meaning, all the while forgetting that it takes the source of its meaning from a field it defines as outside of and inferior to itself (WM, p. 211). "Metaphor" is "always already" a philosophical concept, and intrinsic to this concept is the assumption that metaphysical meaning is superior to sensuous imagery, even though philosophy *depends upon* sensuous images to raise itself above them.

Derrida thus objects to philosophy's definition of metaphor as an investment of meaning that occurs solely within the parameters of its own interest and conscious control. The philosophical concept of metaphor is, by definition, extracted from its own roots. As a result, philosophy uses metaphor *without acknowledging* how this investment of meaning involves the risk of losing or confusing

meaning. As Derrida observes, philosophy has always defined metaphor as that which belongs to its *own* field; it has acknowledged metaphor only insofar as it produces its own *intended* meaning. But according to Derrida, since the concept of metaphor necessarily implies a transference of meaning from another field, philosophy can never be the sole author of its own meaning. Even though—indeed precisely because—philosophy defines the concept of metaphor, it cannot account fully for the metaphors within its own text. In its act of defining the concept of metaphor, philosophy necessarily overlooks at least one basic transference of meaning. It may work to establish a metaphoricity that acknowledges its use of images of light, vision, possession, and so on, but in principle it can never acknowledge all of the metaphors it uses: “If one wished to conceive and to class all the metaphorical possibilities of philosophy, one metaphor, at least, always would remain excluded, outside the system: the metaphor, at the very least, without which the concept of metaphor could not be constructed, . . . the metaphor of metaphor” (WM, pp. 219-20). The conceptualization of metaphor is, as Derrida explains, an “extra turn of speech” which necessarily “becomes the missing turn of speech” (WM, p. 220). By designating “metaphor” a concept, philosophy enacts a metaphoric transference of meaning that remains outside its field of vision. Thus, not only is each of the metaphors it uses on questionable ground, but the very concept of metaphor has its roots beyond the philosopher’s territory.

Accordingly, when Derrida claims that there is a certain “connivance” between the philosophical concept of metaphor and the Hegelian *Aufhebung*, he insinuates that Hegel’s entire philosophy functions on the basis of a metaphoric transference for which it does not account. As we have already seen, Derrida understands the idealization by which the reality of the physical is “lifted up” (*aufgehoben*) into the spiritual as a kind of metaphorical transference: Hegel’s spirit “lifts” itself above nature by employing sensory figures in another, “transferred” sense. Turning again to Anatole France’s dialogue, Derrida emphasizes the

extent to which Hegel creates his philosophical concepts by negating sensuous reality: "In three pages of Hegel, taken at random, in his *Phenomenology* . . . out of six and twenty words, the subjects of important sentences, I found nineteen negative terms. . . . These *abs* and *ins* and *nons* are more effective than any grindstone in planing down."<sup>6</sup> By employing such negative prefixes, Hegel erases sensory images and makes them available for an investment of spiritual meaning. According to Derrida, however, this means that Hegel's philosophy conceals a fundamental contradiction: self-grounding spirit negates the sensuous element of reality in the same moment that it *uses* it. Spirit names itself "spirit" by virtue of a metaphorical transference that it does not even acknowledge; it calls itself self-determining in and as it depends upon its sensuous "other."

Instead of offering a full-fledged investigation of the various metaphors Hegel uses, Derrida focuses his critique on Hegel's conceptualization of metaphor as he presents it in his *Aesthetics*.<sup>7</sup> This strategic move grants Derrida a double advantage. It allows him to reinforce his claim that the philosophical classification of all metaphors is impossible, and at the same time, to suggest that Hegel commits the classical metaphysical error of presuming philosophy's ability to master metaphorical meaning. According to Derrida, Hegel's definition of metaphor remains quite traditional and thus falls prey to his general criticism of the philosophical concept of metaphor. In his lectures on aesthetics, Hegel defines the metaphor as a "compressed comparison" which "deletes" an image's original meaning and attributes a new, intended meaning to it instead (*Ä I*, p. 516). Derrida highlights the way in which this definition confirms the paradox of *usure* he elaborated earlier by quoting the following passage from Hegel's *Aesthetics*:

a) [Metaphors] arise from the fact that a word which originally signifies only something sensuous is carried over into the spiritual sphere. *Fassen*, *begreifen* [to grasp, apprehend] and many words, to speak generally, which relate to knowing, have in respect of their literal meaning a

purely sensuous content, which then is lost and exchanged for a spiritual meaning. . . . b) But gradually the metaphorical element in the use of such a word disappears and by custom the word changes from a metaphorical to a literal expression, because owing to readiness to grasp in the image only the meaning, image and meaning are no longer distinguished, and the image directly affords only the abstract meaning itself instead of a concrete picture. . . . In living languages the difference between actual metaphors and words already reduced by usage to literal expressions is easily established. (Knox translation, pp. 404–405)<sup>8</sup>

Thus Hegel admits that metaphors function through the replacement of sensuous content with a spiritual meaning, and he even observes that the erosion of the original meaning is typically forgotten once the metaphor has been worn down and become customary. However, whereas Hegel sees this “forgetting” as contributing to the clarity and originality of expression, Derrida views it as a regrettable oversight. In Derrida’s view, it leads, for example, to Hegel’s assumption that the difference between literal and metaphorical employment of words can be “easily established” in living languages. According to Derrida, such an assertion results from philosophy’s naive belief that it can circumscribe its metaphors and ground the metaphorical transference completely within its own field. For Derrida there can be no such “easy” distinction between inactive and active metaphors because the meaning and effect of language extend beyond the conscious intentions of those who use it (WM, p. 225).

In the course of “White Mythology,” Derrida implicitly criticizes some other, related aspects of Hegel’s concept of metaphor. First, he denies Hegel’s claim that metaphors work to reveal their meaning completely. In his *Aesthetics*, shortly before the passage Derrida cites, Hegel argues that the metaphor’s intended meaning is made “recognizable at once . . . through the context in which the image occurs” (Knox translation, p. 404; *Ä I*, p. 517). For Derrida, however, the metaphor can offer no such clarity since, as we have just

seen, it may not even be clear whether a given sensory image is to be taken in its metaphorical or in its literal sense. Moreover, according to Derrida, despite philosophy's presumption that it authorizes the meaning of its metaphors, every metaphor bears traces of the sensuous which may communicate more or less than the intended meaning.

Secondly, Derrida disagrees with Hegel's claim that metaphor is inessential to the meaning expressed. According to Hegel's analysis of metaphor in the section of his *Aesthetics* to which Derrida refers, metaphor is a kind of comparison a poet uses when the meaning to be expressed is clearly grasped and present in his or her consciousness (*Ä I*, p. 516). The poet uses metaphor in order to express the depth of intense feeling, exercise creative power, and form something new (*Ä I*, pp. 520–22). Derrida does not refer directly to Hegel on this point, but his reflections upon the philosophical concept of metaphor lead him in a very different direction. For Derrida, the labeling of metaphor "inessential" to the content of an idea is just another desperate attempt on the part of philosophy to preserve its image of itself as enveloping metaphor and controlling its effects. But as Derrida suggests, evidence that this attempt fails surfaces as soon as one notices that even the notion of "expression" and "idea" draw their power from metaphorical transferences. Speaking of philosophical classifications of metaphor in general, Derrida explains as follows:

in order to come back to the internal articulation of philosophical discourse, figures are reduced to modes of "expression" of the idea . . . metaphor is charged with *expressing an idea*, with placing outside or representing the content of a thought that naturally would be called 'idea,' as if each of these words or concepts did not have an entire history of its own . . . and as if an entire metaphysics, or more generally an entire tropic system, had not left several marks within this history. (WM, p. 223)

This point cuts to the heart of the matter for Derrida: philosophy can never master metaphor because it is itself



*rooted in metaphor.* Philosophy may analyze the metaphors within its domain, but it cannot ground these metaphors, for as Derrida succinctly puts it, “Metaphor is less in the philosophical text . . . than the philosophical text is within metaphor” (WM, p. 258). In order to conceive itself as self-grounding, however, philosophy disregards this fact and posits its meaning as independent of its rhetorical modes. This “*unique*” thesis constitutes both philosophy and the concept of metaphor in one stroke (WM, p. 229).

Yet the matter is more complicated. As we shall see when we get to our more complete analysis of Hegel’s treatment of metaphor in chapter one, Hegel does not discuss “metaphor” in the same general sense that Derrida does. He does not equate metaphor with all symbolic forms, but rather develops his theory of metaphor within the context of his general theory of art. There metaphor has a quite restricted meaning: it is a compressed comparison that adorns a literary artwork. This difference in definition means that, at the very least, Derrida’s critique loses some of its force. At the same time, since Derrida’s critique of metaphor in Hegel’s philosophy is directed toward something much more central than Hegel’s understanding of a mere poetic adornment, the discrepancy of definition between the two thinkers indicates that Derrida’s concerns cannot be addressed simply at this level. Since Derrida’s critique of metaphor pertains to symbolic forms in general and since it raises concerns about spirit’s complete self-determination, we will need to consider the extensive terrain through which spirit travels and pay special attention to the various symbolic dimensions of spirit before we can respond adequately to Derrida’s concerns.

### *B. Spirit’s Use of the Sign*

Since his essay, “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” an essay widely taken to mark the inauguration of poststructuralism, Derrida has worked to show how the pretensions of metaphysics derive, to a large extent, from its conception of the sign.<sup>9</sup> As he con-

tends, traditional philosophy arrogates to itself the status of central scientific discourse in and through its understanding of the sign. Metaphysics uses the sign to assure itself that it contains its foundation within itself. Associating "Being" too readily with presence, metaphysics understands the sign's indication of presence as a demonstration that what it conceives as central to its own systematic integrity actually *is*. In other words, metaphysics understands the sign as confirming the presence of its central, grounding principle—whether substance, essence, subject, ego, existence, or God.

But according to Derrida, the sign can offer no such confirmation. The presence of a sign does nothing to assure the underlying presence of what it signifies. Quite to the contrary, for Derrida, the sign actually serves to supplement the necessary *absence* of the centrally conceived "transcendental" signified. Such a concept is never present "in itself" as the foundational concept it is conceived to be, but is only operative within "a system of differences" (Derrida, SSP, p. 280). The sign is required, in other words, precisely because this central, grounding concept *cannot* be present, cannot show itself as such in the metaphysical system. Nevertheless, in its rigorous quest for certainty, metaphysics remains blind to this fact. In conceiving the sign as revealing or signifying its central concepts, it fails to acknowledge the real implications of the sign's mediating role. More precisely, metaphysics takes the sign as the clear indicator of the presence of the transcendental signified because it forgets or disregards the difference between the sign and the thing it signifies—that is, the difference between the "signifier" and the "signified," a difference intrinsic to the functioning of the sign. As a result, it assumes the sign to reveal the signified's presence, while, according to Derrida, what the sign actually does is *conceal the signified's absence*. Accordingly, Derrida concludes that the fundamental principles of metaphysics, the central concepts of traditional philosophy, are but a series of metaphors which only seem to be present (that is, real) because the sign's mediating role is overlooked.

In his essay "The Pit and the Pyramid: Introduction to Hegel's Semiology," Derrida applies this same general critique of metaphysics to Hegel's *Philosophy of Spirit*. Specifically, he aims to show how the concept of the sign serves to establish Hegel's notion of spirit as completely self-present and thus wholly self-determining. Aware that for Hegel the coming-to-be of spirit is a long and complicated process that involves periods of self-estrangement, Derrida immediately draws attention to the fact that Hegel introduces his notion of the sign just at the point at which spirit returns to itself from its alienation in nature, that is, in his philosophy of subjective spirit. Noting how this placement of the sign concurs with the established metaphysical tradition, Derrida shows no surprise that the sign "belongs to the science of the moment when the idea comes back to itself after having, if we may put it thus, lost awareness, lost the consciousness and meaning of itself in nature, in its Being-other" (P&P, p. 74). But Derrida is suspicious about this all-too-convenient "coordination" of the sign with spirit's subjective self-presence. As he notes, Hegel's placement of the sign at the level of "finite" spirit reduces the sign, even on Hegel's terms, to the status of a mere transition. Established in the service of subjective spirit's theoretical and psychological development, the sign can have no ultimate reality or meaning in itself; it "is" and "means" only according to the designation of spirit's subjective intelligence. Indeed, according to Derrida's analysis, spirit employs the sign for its own edification and denies the sign's reality in the very process. More specifically, the sensible element of the sign is discounted in the name of a conceptual determination. As Derrida notes, "the sign is understood according to the structure and movement of the *Aufhebung*." (P&P, p. 76). Like the metaphor, the sign enacts the process of idealization, but it does so even more completely because it discounts all resemblance to the sensuous and so designates a complete break with it. For Derrida, this move reenacts the typical metaphysical gesture in which the signifier, the material element of the sign, is disregarded in the name of an intelligible concept, the signified meaning.

In Derrida's view, this disavowal of the sign's mediation represents a great problem for Hegel's entire philosophy of spirit. In order to bring itself into existence as the self-knowing subject it asserts itself to be, spirit requires the materiality of an exterior sign. Yet, in the very process of this determination, it denies its dependency on the sign and assumes itself to have determined itself all on its own. For Derrida, then, far from assuring spirit's full self-presence and freedom, the *Aufhebung* of the sign by the sign actually attests to spirit's self-delusion. Accordingly, Derrida sees it fitting that Hegel should develop his theory of the sign in the course of his philosophy of imagination, that is, as a theory of "phantasiology or a fantastics" (P&P, p. 76). For, as Derrida wants to suggest, spirit only *imagines* itself to be completely self-determining.

Derrida organizes his critique of Hegel's semiology around two predominant metaphors that Hegel uses in his account of the sign, "the pit" and "the pyramid." In the first part of his critique he traces the process in which the intelligence comes to assert its independence in and as it appropriates that exterior material reality. Beginning with his discussion of the intelligence's interiorization (*Erinnerung*) of its intuitions, the phase of spirit's theoretical development which precedes the imagination, Derrida consistently points out how the very being and development of the intelligence depends upon its interiorization of that which is exterior. As he observes, the imagination can begin its work only on the basis of the intelligence's prior act of interiorization: "*Erinnerung*, thus, is decisive here. By means of *Erinnerung* the content of sensible intuition becomes an image, freeing itself from immediacy and singularity in order to permit the passage to conceptuality" (P&P, p. 77). This move already begins to mark for Derrida an erasure of the sensuous. As he emphasizes, "The image thus interiorized in memory (*erinnert*) is no longer *there*, no longer existent or present, but preserved in an unconscious dwelling, conserved without consciousness (*bewusstlos, aufbewahrt*)." (P&P, p. 77). Indeed, Hegel himself describes the image as being transformed into something that is neither

consciousness nor existence, but a “virtual possibility” (*virtueller Möglichkeit*) stored in the dark “pit” of the intelligence (*ENZ. III*, §453). Later with the first stage of the imagination, reproductive imagination, the intelligence draws upon this reserve in order to begin to call its higher capacities into existence. Nevertheless, as Derrida well notes, the intelligence remains primarily passive at this point; it does not produce anything not originally given to it in sensation: “Thus disposing of a reserve of images, intelligence operates by subsumption, and itself finds itself reproduced, recalled, interiorized. . . . The self-identity of intelligence has found itself once again, but has done so in a subjective unilaterality, in the passivity of impression” (P&P, p. 78). However, once the intelligence learns to associate its images according to rules—that is, once it learns to produce signs and symbols—it succeeds in externalizing its active capacity and so in making itself “be.” Hegel describes this activity as a highly creative one, but Derrida considers it nothing more than “a simple exteriorization . . . an *expression*: the placing outside of an interior content.” (P&P, p. 78). In this way, Derrida suggests that the intelligence does not really act on its own accord, but remains dependent on that which is exterior to it, that is to say, on the sensible exterior element it appropriates. The intelligence asserts its “own” activity simply by exhibiting content it has assimilated from the outside.

For Derrida this contradiction intrinsic to intelligence seems to reach its peak in Hegel’s somewhat “scandalous” claim that the intelligence “*produce[s] intuitions*” (P&P, p. 78). Not only does Hegel assert that the intelligence creates itself, but he also identifies the activity of conception with the creation of intuitions. Suspicious of the idea that the spontaneity of intuition can be generated by intelligent activity, Derrida observes that such an assertion does at least concur with Hegel’s general theory of the sign:

Production *and* intuition, the concept of the sign will thus be the place where all contradictory characteristics intersect. All oppositions of concepts are reassembled, summa-

rized and swallowed up within it. All contradictions seem to be resolved in it, but simultaneously that which is announced beneath the same sign seems irreducible or inaccessible to any formal opposition of concepts; being *both* interior and exterior, spontaneous and receptive, intelligible and sensible, the same and the other, etc., the sign is none of these, neither this nor that, etc. (P&P, p. 79)

In short, as Derrida concludes, the sign turns out to be the key to Hegelian dialectics, the agent which transforms oppositions into dialectical unity. A step beyond the metaphor, which maintains a resemblance with the sensible, the sign is determined *as thoroughly determinable* by spirit; it is defined as bearing no trace of the sensuous. Constituting a “merely formal” transition, the sign “swallows up” the difference between the active and the passive, the internal and the external, spirit and its other. Its own material reality is discounted and it is made into a *mere means* of theoretical identification.

What this indicates to Derrida, however, is that spirit’s creative act of self-determination, its return-to-self, is intrinsically linked to the death or dismissal of the sign’s material element. As Derrida sees it, Hegel admits this point at least implicitly when he associates the meaning of the sign with the “soul” and thus the material element of the sign with the body (*ENZ III*, §458; P&P, p. 82). But the association with death becomes stronger when Hegel explicitly calls the sign a “pyramid,” that is, a kind of tomb: “The sign is a kind of immediate intuition, which represents a completely other content than that which it has for itself;—the *pyramid*, in which a foreign soul is displaced and preserved (*versetzt und aufbewahrt*)” (*ENZ III*, §458; P&P, pp. 82–83). After remarking how Hegel’s semiology confirms this traditional metaphysical opposition of body and soul, Derrida points out how the conceptual investment in this opposition yields an abundant return of spirit:

Hegel knew that this proper and animated body of the signifier was also a *tomb*. The association *sōma* / *sēma* is also at work in this semiology. . . . The tomb is the life of the

body as the sign of death, the body as the other of the soul, the other of the animate psyche, of the living breath. But the tomb also shelters, maintains in reserve, capitalizes on life by marking that life continues elsewhere. The family crypt: *oikēsis*. It consecrates the disappearance of life by attesting to the perseverance of life. The body of the sign thus becomes the monument in which the soul will be enclosed, preserved, maintained, kept in maintenance, present, signified. It was necessary for death to be at work . . . for a monument to come to retain and protect the life of the soul by signifying it. (P&P, pp. 82–83)

Spirit resurrects itself in and through the sign. The sign is its passageway to rebirth, the medium through which it rediscovers itself. In the process spirit sees itself as justified in dismissing the sign as a merely formal transition because it believes itself to have created and defined the sign as such. But, according to Derrida, spirit misapprehends the sign when it assumes it to be a mere site of absence wholly open to its determination, for the sign's very being requires that it have material characteristics *present* to the intelligence in intuition, *Erinnerung*, and the early stages of the imagination. Thus Derrida insists that spirit's gain occurs through material loss; it finds itself only by dispensing with the sensuous element of the sign. Only through this discounting of the sign's positive element does Hegel manage to conceive the freedom of theoretical spirit. Only by imprisoning the material element of the sign at the bottom of a dark pit and then entombing it in cold, lifeless stone is Hegel able to conceive of spirit's complete theoretical self-determination.

Derrida's doubts about the sign's supposedly "transparent" mediation lead him to question not only spirit's assertion to have found itself without external assistance and without real loss, but also its claim to be able to determine theoretical reality—that is, to conceive and define meaning. For, as Derrida notes, the sign serves not only as the means to spirit's self-presence, but also as a basic instrument of meaning in general. As we have just seen, by limiting the sign's reality to spirit's act of signification—that is, by defining the sign as having reality only in so far as it stands for

“a completely other content” (*ENZ III*, §458), spirit discounts the sign’s sensuous presence. In so doing, it dismisses the sign as an external medium and clears the sign for its own imposition of meaning. Since spirit views the sign as a kind of tomb that bears no intrinsic connection to the living meaning with which it is invested, it believes itself capable of determining the sign to mean whatever it chooses, and it is precisely in this act of imposing its own determination that spirit experiences itself as free. As Derrida notes, the arbitrariness of the sign “manifests the freedom of spirit” (P&P, p. 86). Indeed, at this level of theoretical spirit, the arbitrariness of the sign is itself the sign of spirit’s freedom. With the recognition of its power of determination, the intelligence becomes able to create words and so develop into “thought.”

Yet for Derrida, this transition to spiritual freedom in thought is highly problematic. First of all, the arbitrariness of the intelligence’s use of the sign again represents a kind of loss, an erasure of the sensible: “It follows, as concerns the sign, that the content of the sensory intuition (the signifier) must erase itself, must vanish before *Bedeutung* [meaning or significance], before the signified ideality, all the while conserving itself and conserving *Bedeutung*.” (P&P, p. 89). Moreover, according to Derrida, the complete erasure of the sensory image presumed by philosophy is simply not possible. Although one may try to abstract from the original sensuous existence that underlies a concept, one is never assured of being able to do so. The concepts reverberate with their original sensuous associations whether one is aware of it or not. Thus the problem here is not just a denied loss of the sensible, but also the inability to attain the purely conceptual. Even though abstract thought might believe itself capable of bestowing clarified meaning upon words, the material element of language—that is, the previous associations attached to the supposedly “canceled” aspects of the sign—inevitably surface to confuse the intelligence’s intention.

According to Derrida, the belief that thought can assign a single meaning to each word leads Hegel to privilege



spoken language over written language, as well as alphabetic writing over hieroglyphic writing (P&P, pp. 93–99). In both cases the first term is privileged because it somehow remains closer to thought and therefore allows less room for ambiguity and confusion. The process of idealization which transforms the sensible into thought is at the same time a movement from the exteriority of space to the interiority of time (P&P, p. 89); thought grasps the multiplicity of its experience in terms of its own internal order, that is, in terms of time rather than space. For this reason Hegel considers the sound of the voice to be the signifier best suited to thought's internal process: it does not take up external space as does anything with pictorial existence and is thus most appropriate to spirit's articulation of meaning (*ENZ III*, §459; P&P, p. 89). Spirit can assert the power of its intention upon the spoken word because these words remain close to its own thought process. Written words, by contrast, run a greater risk of accumulating multiple meanings because they become detached from the thought that authorizes and intends them.

According to Derrida, Hegel privileges alphabetic writing over hieroglyphic writing for similar reasons. Like all forms of writing, alphabetic writing takes up a certain amount of space, but, as Derrida explains, "it erases its own spacing better than any other" because "it respects, translates, or transcribes the voice, that is, idealization, the movement of the spirit relating itself to its own interiority and hearing itself speak" (P&P, p. 95). Since hieroglyphic writing stands removed from the voice of spirit, it does not maintain a one-to-one correspondence between its exterior form and that which it represents. In the case of Egyptian hieroglyphic writing, the cause for this polysemia lies in its being too "symbolic," in other words, too closely linked to the sensuous elements of experience; in the case of Chinese hieroglyphic writing, the source of ambiguity lies in its too abstract and too numerous use of signs (P&P, pp. 97, 102).<sup>10</sup> In both cases, however, there is a failure to limit each sign to its single meaning, and in Derrida's view, Hegel believes this failure derives from the fact that hieroglyphic writing is

removed from the domain of spirit and buried in the sensuous (P&P, 105–106). In order to emphasize this connection between spirit's attempt to determine meaning and the dismissal of the sensuous, Derrida follows his discussion of hieroglyphic writing with a consideration of mathematical language, claiming that mathematical language is "contrary to the concept" because it "remains *sensory*" and can dispense with phonetic pronunciation (P&P, p. 106). As Derrida explains, nonphonetic writing—whether hieroglyphic or mathematical—violates the "irreducible privilege of the name," "the keystone of the Hegelian philosophy of language" (P&P, p. 96).

In this way Derrida calls attention to Hegel's traditional privileging of spoken over written language and seeks to interrogate his entire "*linguistics of the word*" (P&P, p. 96). Declining to develop an extensive argument at this point, Derrida makes an implicit appeal to his previous work and to the work of other philosophers of language: "Today we know that the word no longer has the linguistic rank that has almost always been accorded to it. It is a relative unity." (P&P, p. 96). As he has argued elsewhere, it is impossible for words to escape the effects of dissemination: they are bound to mean both more and less than thought intends. While this problem in meaning is most evident in written words and texts, it is a characteristic of all forms of language. Since every word is enmeshed in a history of meaning developing and changing over time and circumstance, it is impossible to guarantee that the words written in one circumstance will "mean" what the author intends them to mean in another circumstance. Not only is the reader subject to new inflections of meaning, but the author is subject to unconscious dimensions of reality. There is no telling, ultimately, what a text, or even a given word, "means" because every word and every text harbors within it the traces of various, if not contradictory, meanings.

Both elements of Derrida's critique of Hegel's philosophy of subjective spirit—spirit's assertion of its complete self-determination and its assumption of the power to determine meaning in general—amount to the claim that

Hegel naively understands the sign as capable of communicating univocal meaning. According to Derrida, however, the conscious intentions of the intelligence are limited by the material element of the sign. Hegel unjustifiably reduces the sign to its signified meaning and thus fails to take into account the way in which the material signifier may defy the intelligence's intentions. Indeed as Derrida has insisted, there are two opposing ways of treating the difference between the signifier and the signified: the metaphysical method, which he discerns in Hegel's philosophy of spirit, and his own method which aims to work "against" the metaphysical one. The first way, he says, "consists in reducing or deriving the signifier, that is to say, ultimately in *submitting* the sign to thought," while the alternative Derrida proposes involves a questioning of the whole system which establishes and condones this submission (SSP, p. 281). More specifically, as he explains, this second method involves a questioning of the very opposition of the sensible and the intelligible: "For the paradox is that the metaphysical reduction of the sign needed the opposition it was reducing" (SSP, p. 281). Metaphysics denies the difference between the sensible and the intelligible at the very moment it exploits this difference.

Thus, whether his critique focuses on the concept of metaphor or of the sign, Derrida's main objection to Hegel's philosophy is that its notion of spirit is based upon a reduction and denial of the sensuous and the ambiguity that pertains to it. As Derrida would have it, the supposedly free self-determination of spirit occurs on the basis of an underlying physical dimension for which it does not adequately account; Hegel's philosophy "gets carried away in and of itself" and forgets that it does not know the source of its concepts (WM, p. 211). The concepts of metaphor and sign serve to hide this deficit intrinsic to philosophical discourse.

However, as we shall see in the following chapters, Derrida's criticism loses much of its force when considered in light of a more complete analysis of the role of the symbolic in Hegel's philosophy. Along with most other readers of Hegel, Derrida assumes that Hegel sees his own philosophy

as overcoming the symbol's ties to the sensuous and articulating itself in the transparency of the sign (P&P, p. 106). To be sure, at certain points in his philosophy, Hegel does seem to hold such a position. However, as we shall see, the clarity and stability of the sign represent only one aspect of Hegel's philosophical dialectic. The sign constitutes only one side of the existence and activity of spirit. Once we acknowledge the full extent of the involvement of the symbolic in Hegel's notion of spirit, we can begin to realize the extent to which his philosophy can be defended against Derrida's criticisms. Hegel does not simply dismiss the ambiguity of the sensuous in the way that Derrida suggests.

The first two chapters of this book will respond explicitly to Derrida at the places of intervention just discussed—the metaphor and the sign. Then, however, in order to respond fully to Derrida's concerns, we will need to go beyond the Hegelian texts that deal specifically with the sign and metaphor to a wider consideration of spirit's "absolute" capacity for self-determination. In the process of our analysis, we will see how Hegel's spirit repeatedly resorts to *symbolic* expressions of itself. Indeed, as chapter five will show, even Hegel's notion of philosophy remains dependent upon the symbolic dimensions of spirit in an important way. While this "dependency" may at first seem to confirm Derrida's suspicions regarding spirit's act of self-determination, it need not be understood as doing so. For even as the symbolic interrupts spirit's act of thinking itself with transparent clarity, it propels spirit toward an ever greater depth of self-comprehension. The negativity of the symbolic thus turns out to be "just as much positive" (*WL I*, p. 49). Insofar as the symbolic appears as other than spirit, it also *belongs to* spirit. This apparent paradox lies at the very heart of Hegel's notion of spirit: spirit is essentially constituted by its negativity; it becomes itself in and through its other. Spirit does not reduce its other to itself; it simply uses the difference between itself and its other as a means to its own self-manifestation. This is why Hegel insists that absolute spirit has no *absolute* other (*ENZ III*, §377): there is nothing it cannot know, nothing that cannot enrich its act of self-creation.

For Derrida, of course, such a concept of spirit represents an impossible appropriation of the “other.” Hegel propagates a naive metaphysical illusion and remains blind to the absolute negativity that threatens his system. Blind to the “baselessness of the nonmeaning from which the basis of meaning is drawn,” Hegel fails, according to Derrida, to recognize the radical negativity that exceeds the logic of his system.<sup>11</sup> Though Hegel recognizes a certain negativity as intrinsic to his notion of spirit, he denies that there could be a negativity that does not somehow support spiritual growth. Loss, limitation, and death ultimately constitute for Hegel a positive state of being. But as Derrida notes, there is a subtle, but total difference between a loss that yields a return of being and a loss that is *simply* a loss. There is a delicate, but complete difference between Hegel’s understanding of what it means “*to be dead*” and a more radical understanding of what it means “*to be dead*.”<sup>12</sup> Derrida’s discourse is directed toward an understanding of how the latter—that is, how a negative that *cannot* be taken positively, an other that is not *spirit’s* other<sup>13</sup>—makes Hegel’s notion of spirit subject to the risk of a total loss of meaning (RGE, p. 256). The matter is complicated by the fact that, as Derrida himself confesses, it is impossible to prove the existence of such a negative within the logic of metaphysical presence or within the language of any discourse intent upon meaning. For as he notes, what exceeds the system is a “negativity that never takes place, that never presents itself, because in doing so it would start to work again” (RGE, p. 256). Therefore, as Derrida is forced to admit, Hegel “is always right, as soon as one opens one’s mouth in order to articulate meaning” (RGE, p. 263). The minute such a negativity is given in words, it serves the coherence and power of the system (RGE, p. 259). The only way those who practice deconstruction can let this negativity have its effects is by playing with language, by using “ruses,” “stratagems,” and “simulacra” (RGE, p. 263). That is why the discourse of deconstruction is ultimately incommensurable with any kind of discourse that aims to mean. That is why we cannot, here, do real justice to Derrida’s position.

What we can and will do, however, is consider Hegel's concept of spirit in light of Derrida's suspicions about it. By focusing on the ways in which Hegel's notion of spirit actually includes the symbolic, we can come to see why Hegel insists that no kind of negativity is too radical for self-determining spirit. We can come to see how there can be a spirit for whom no absolute other exists—a spirit that succeeds in determining itself, not just in spite of all threats to its very being, but because of them. Most importantly, we can come to see how Hegel conceives of a wholly self-determining spirit that is at once open to the difference of the “other.”

## II. The Need to Consider the Symbolic

### A. *Other Commentators on Hegel and the Symbol*

Oddly enough, despite both the great interest in philosophies of the symbol and the ongoing revival in Hegelian studies, relatively few commentators have dealt at all with the symbol in connection with Hegel's philosophy. Even those who have dealt specifically with the two texts of Hegel's mature works that deal explicitly with the symbol have tended to mention the symbol only in passing. For example, Bungay,<sup>14</sup> Desmond,<sup>15</sup> Gethmann-Siebert,<sup>16</sup> Glockner,<sup>17</sup> Kaminsky,<sup>18</sup> Kuhn,<sup>19</sup> Szondi,<sup>20</sup> and Wicks<sup>21</sup> have each offered extensive analyses of Hegel's *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik* including his discussion of the symbolic form of art, but no one has drawn special attention to the importance of the symbol or symbolic art form for Hegel's idea of art or spirit more generally. Jeong Kwon<sup>22</sup> does focus on Hegel's concepts of the symbol and symbolic art, but she also restricts herself specifically to Hegel's aesthetics. This study draws upon her work to some degree, but it also extends beyond it and discusses the importance of the symbol throughout the whole of Hegel's philosophy. In his short article “Sign and Symbol in Hegel's Aesthetics,” Paul de Man does in fact try to draw out the more general implications of the symbolic in Hegel,<sup>23</sup> but his concerns tend toward literary theory, and

therefore, like those of Rehder,<sup>24</sup> Tucker,<sup>25</sup> and Münzhuber,<sup>26</sup> have little to do with Hegel's philosophy *per se*.

The case is similar with respect to Hegel's *Philosophie des Geistes*. While there exists no shortage of philosophers who have presented analyses of this text or sections of it, no one has made much of Hegel's comments on the symbol. DeVries notes the lack of a rigid distinction between the sign and the symbol in Hegel's text, but he draws no general conclusion on the basis of this fact.<sup>27</sup> Sallis offers a careful reading of the various editions and additions of Hegel's discussion of the imagination, and while he uses this analysis to raise important questions about Hegel's philosophy as a whole, he does not focus on Hegel's concept of the symbol or the symbolic imagination. Similarly, Clark offers an analysis of representation in general and in its relation to thought, but he also declines to attribute any special importance to the symbol.<sup>28</sup> Cook,<sup>29</sup> Simon,<sup>30</sup> Bodammer,<sup>31</sup> along with many others who have concerned themselves with the question of language in Hegel's philosophy, have given minimal attention to the symbol and focused on the role of the sign instead. McCumber *appears* to discuss the symbol in the course of his study of language in the philosophy of Hegel, but he does not follow Hegel's definition of the term. Instead he deals most often with "arbitrary symbols" and thus restricts his discussion of symbols to what Hegel means by the sign.<sup>32</sup> Habermas also speaks of a "symbolic mediation" with respect to Hegel's Jena *Philosophie des Geistes*, but he departs from Hegel's definition of the term as well.<sup>33</sup>

In contrast to these works which have focused on one of these two texts, my study seeks to offer a more comprehensive understanding of the role of the symbol in Hegel's philosophy. More importantly, whereas isolated considerations of either Hegel's psychology or aesthetics have tended to lead to the assumption that Hegel advances a straightforward preference for the sign over the symbol, this work proposes that the symbol's function is just as essential to spirit's process of complete self-determination as the sign's function is. This work, in other words, aims to demonstrate that spirit does not simply supersede, delete, or cancel its

reliance upon symbolic mediation. The direction of this work is thus fairly close to Verene's, whose analysis of Hegel's *Phenomenology* (*Phänomenologie*) shows the concept's perpetual dependence upon the image.<sup>34</sup> However, while Verene shows Hegel's recourse to *the use of images*, this work focuses on Hegel's *explicit comments* regarding the symbol and their implication for his philosophy of mind, art, religion, and most importantly, for spirit as a whole.

*B. Spirit's Symbolic Self-determination  
in the Imagination, Art, and Religion*

Given this particular focus on the symbol and the symbolic, the guiding question of this work may be stated in the following way: How do symbols contribute to spirit's act of self-determination? How, in other words, do they enable spirit to bring itself into existence, and in what way, if any, do they limit spirit's act of self-completion? Before embarking on the complexities of this interpretation, chapter one will set forth a basic, preliminary understanding of the symbol and the sign as Hegel defines and uses these terms in his lectures and written texts. Chapter two will then show how the intelligence's struggle to achieve identity between its subjective act and its objective experience induces it to create symbols and signs. Here we will affirm that when it comes to spirit's activity of *thought*, Hegel believes the sign's structure to be more fitting than the symbol's. Thus we will admit the sense in which the assumption that Hegel prefers the linguistic mediation of the sign to the tangible mediation of the symbol is justified. At the same time, however, we will see how this signifying mediation depends upon a symbolic one for both its derivation and its fulfillment. Although the sign is essential to spirit's formal act of self-determination and so to thought, spirit is and must be in "other" forms as well. Even at the point of its absolute realization, spirit needs the symbolic forms of art and religion.

Accordingly, chapters three and four will demonstrate the ways in which the absolute forms of art and religion contain significant symbolic elements and how these are



necessary to spirit's act of full self-determination. In no way do these chapters intend to endorse Hegel's historical analyses of various cultures, but they do mean to show how the different forms that Hegel believes spirit to experience in art and religion allow spirit to contact itself in ways that it cannot in philosophy. As we shall see, Hegel's philosophy of art does not only include a kind of art that is specifically "symbolic": it also conceives of art *as generally symbolic*. Hegel's lectures on aesthetics imply that symbolic art's inability to resolve the opposition between content and form adequately is characteristic of art as such. Even though Hegel conceives of the classical art form as adequate to its content, he acknowledges that it contains significant symbolic elements. More importantly, he suggests that this form of art is limited in view of spirit's *total* self-recognition. In classical art spirit knows itself in the sensuous human form, but it does not know itself *as spirit*. For this reason the classical art form gives way to romantic art, an art form which is explicitly symbolic in that it acknowledges and expresses art's inherent inability to express spirit adequately. For Hegel, all art is symbolic from the point of view of modern religion and philosophy: it simultaneously reveals and conceals the truth even as it serves to constitute spirit as absolute.

To a great extent, the absolute form of religion may also be understood as symbolic. By Hegel's definition, religion refers to "the Idea of spirit which relates itself to itself"; it is "*the self-consciousness of absolute spirit*" (*das Selbstbewusstsein des absoluten Geistes*) (VPR I-m, p. 222). While art lets spirit present itself to itself in an immediate way, religion facilitates spirit's encounter with itself *as spirit*: it allows spirit to conceive itself as self-reflecting and self-knowing. Hegel sees representation (*die Vorstellung*) as appropriate to religion because it performs this identification (VPR I-m, p. 297). Representation unites the religious object with religious consciousness; it connects the particularity of what consciousness experiences as an external object with its generalized subjective formulation of it (VPR I-m, pp. 291–92; ENZ III, §454). This unity of objective and subjec-

tive aspects is not absolute, however. As Hegel defines it, representation's act of identification presupposes a difference between the objective existent and the subjective image of it, and therefore precludes the possibility of a *total* unification of the two sides. Opposed to the sensuous but not totally free of it, representation assumes an immediate presence to exist outside of consciousness (*VPR III-m*, p. 105). For this reason, Hegel specifies that all the forms of representing religious consciousness are psychological and therefore finite (*VPR I-s*, p. 114).

As Hegel describes it, religious consciousness tends toward symbolic representation in that it seeks to give its images a meaning that transcends their immediacy. Religious consciousness, whose most appropriate form is representation, thus tends toward symbolization in three significant ways. First, religious consciousness attributes a general meaning or conception to immediacies that have some qualities in common with that general meaning as well as others which are distinct from it. Relying on the capacity of the associative imagination, which works according to the principle of self-identification, it seeks to unify its images into a coherent whole. Secondly, it communicates its meaning ambiguously because it does not clarify the basis or limitation of the identification it asserts. Sometimes, too, as a result of this lack of clarification, it tends to mistake something finite for something absolute and thus fails to acknowledge the limitations of the identification it asserts. Finally, in one way or another, religious consciousness sustains a divergence between its form and its meaning, its activity of representation and the object it seeks to represent. Through religious representation, spirit seeks to know itself fully, but it only discovers itself partially. Without recognizing the limitations of religious consciousness and its form of representation, it cannot come to see its "other" as itself. Consequently, it cannot avoid being alienated from itself in at least some way. The representations of religious consciousness symbolize its self-unity, but they do not manifest it completely. In Hegel's system, religion stands midway between art and philosophy: its representations and

conceptions go beyond the immediate form of art but they do not quite reach the self-clarifying form of thought employed by philosophy. Religion *portrays the content* of spirit, but it does not *demonstrate the truth* of this content. Nonetheless, as we shall see in chapter four, Hegel insists upon the necessity of this symbolic portrayal.

Finally, chapter five will show how Hegel understands philosophy to rise above the limitations of the symbolic even while it depends upon the specificity of the symbolic form. According to Hegel, philosophy is the most appropriate form for the expression of spirit because it, too, has its ground within itself. As the fundamental science, philosophy is not subject to any necessity outside of itself. It is *its own* ground and it has *its own* necessity. Or, more accurately, through the process of its development, philosophy, like spirit, *generates* its own ground and necessity. However, as we will see, despite the success of philosophy, *spirit* continues to have recourse to the symbolic forms of art and religion.

### III. Hegel's Idea of Spirit

#### A. *Neither Right nor Left*

By focusing on the role of the symbol in spirit's mediation, this analysis aims to suggest a view of spirit that will *resist the reduction* to either a "left-wing" or "right-wing" interpretation. As dangerous as these categorizations (and the oversimplifications which they imply) are, the fact that they are already established is reason enough to employ them for a basic outline of different interpretations of Hegel's philosophy. Indeed, two very broad trends in Hegel studies may be noted. On the one hand, there are those who point out the contradictions in Hegel's systematic philosophy and deny that his notion of spirit satisfactorily resolves them. Like Derrida, these commentators question the possibility of spirit being wholly self-determining, and they tend to emphasize the finite, contradictory, *human* elements of spirit. Given the great extent to which these thinkers read Hegel

in light of Nietzsche and Marx and focus on the way in which spirit arises in and through the process of human history, these interpretations have been categorized as “left-wing” interpretations. In the manner of Kojève, for example, they emphasize *the difference* intrinsic to spirit and interpret spirit as human action that cannot be totally resolved into a collective unity. Or like Habermas, they stress the ways in which language or labor gives rise to spirit over against the idea of spirit’s own self-determination.<sup>35</sup> Others point to the difference between language and thought in order to argue against Hegel’s conception of a self-determining spirit. Simon suggests, for example, that the absolute’s dependence on linguistic mediation leads to its inevitable self-distortion.<sup>36</sup> By contrast, Gadamer argues that spirit may produce a kind of wholeness through language; however, he too denies the “absoluteness” of this wholeness, suggesting that it is the mere effect of language and therefore exists only as a linguistic or textual relativity.<sup>37</sup> Others such as Joseph Flay deny Hegel’s thesis of a self-determining spirit by suggesting that Hegel presupposes the very thing he claims to demonstrate.<sup>38</sup>

While each of these and related works have served to enrich the interpretation of Hegel to be proposed here, the aim of this work is very different. Instead of offering a critique of Hegel’s philosophy, this work seeks to give it the most sympathetic reading possible. In other words, this reading of Hegel *begins by giving Hegel the benefit of the doubt*. Instead of showing how his concept of spirit might fall short of our understanding of complete self-determination, this work begins by asking what this complete self-determination *would have to mean* in order for it to include the real loss the above-mentioned commentators insist it must have. By interpreting Hegel’s philosophy from the point of view of his theory of the symbol and his understanding of the symbolic, we can come to see how the contradictoriness, negativity, and “otherness” inherent to spirit is less an impediment to spirit’s self-realization than *the condition for it*. Far from preventing spirit’s experience and certainty of wholeness and self-determination, the symbolic

grants spirit the real experience of its otherness—the occasion to know itself in its incongruity and to think itself “not thinking.” In this sense, it actually serves the purpose of *completing* spirit. Hegel does not deny that the losses that spirit experiences are real. His point is just that these losses *also* have a positive value: they enrich and complete spirit’s knowledge of itself. Without the *real* experience of loss, spirit *would not know what loss is* and therefore would not have complete knowledge of reality.

A host of other interpretations oppose the left-wing interpretations and hence are sometimes classified as “right-wing.” These interpretations tend to emphasize *the identity* of spirit at the cost of its difference. In so doing they often stress the infinite, self-reconciled, and *divine* aspects of spirit and downplay the finite, human dimension. Not surprisingly, this general view has often been suggested by commentators who have focused on Hegel’s philosophy of religion. In asserting the identification of Hegel’s “God” with “Spirit,” Lauer, for example, interprets spirit as divine revelation and thereby underestimates the sense in which human beings also create “spirit.”<sup>39</sup> But this “right-wing” tendency is not limited to scholars of Hegel’s philosophy of religion. Other commentators who seem to emphasize the identity of spirit at the expense of its difference include Fink and Guzzoni. Fink speaks of the finite’s supersession by the infinite, but does not discuss the way in which the infinite is in need of the finite.<sup>40</sup> Guzzoni stresses that the absolute is the movement of “coming to itself,” but her emphasis on Hegel’s logic leads her to accent spirit’s identity over its difference.<sup>41</sup>

In contrast to *both* sides of this debate, *The Symbolic Mediation of Spirit* insists upon an *equal emphasis* of the finite and infinite, immediate and mediating, identical and differing, divine and human aspects of spirit. In its negotiation of a sort of middle point between left- and right-wing interpretations, this interpretation of Hegel builds upon the “intersubjective” notions of spirit suggested by commentators such as Siep<sup>42</sup> and especially Williams.<sup>43</sup> In my view these readings of Hegel are among the most accurate. For,

according to Hegel, “spirit” or “mind” (*Geist*) arises as the unity of two lesser dimensions of reality, “soul” (*die Seele*) and “consciousness” (*Bewusstsein*) (*ENZ III*, §§382, 440–42). It thus *combines* the sense of totality that comes from the soul *with* the reflective knowing of consciousness that always involves a kind of self-alienation. Both alienation and totality, identity and difference, *remain* a part of what spirit is. Spirit reconciles these two sides, but, as Hegel points out over and over again, spirit is the *continual activity* of this reconciliation, not merely the end result of it. As Hegel insists, spirit’s “life is act” (*VGP I*, p. 21). It never gets to the point of being able to “be” in a simple, immediate, or nondifferentiated way. Spirit’s identity *depends upon* the real difference it bears within itself. Its identification is only as true as its difference: “The power of spirit is only as great as its expression, its depth only as deep as it dares to spread itself out and lose itself in its exposition” (*PG*, p. 18). Spirit never gets to the point of being able to deny or cancel its intrinsic negativity because this negativity is essential to what spirit is. It cannot forget or disregard its internal difference because this difference is the source and substance of its life. For Hegel, spirit, the ultimate truth of reality, is something that both is there *and* something that *makes itself* be there; it is both immediate and mediated, self-identical and self-differentiating. Spirit is the activity that unites these two dimensions of reality.

### *B. Spirit’s Identity and Difference*

Spirit, for Hegel, is reducible neither to human finitude nor to metaphysical abstraction. It does not let the finite be “swallowed up” in the infinite, nor does it reduce the infinite to the finite. Spirit *unifies* these oppositions without denying the differences between them. But in order to comprehend how spirit manages this unification, we must pay particular attention to spirit’s symbolizing and sign-making activities.

Of course, for Hegel, the kind of indifferent expression accomplished by thought’s use of language is critical to the

philosophical enterprise of clarity and coherence. For this reason, Hegel considers the “transparent” linguistic mediation performed by the sign more appropriate to philosophical thought than symbolic mediations. Indeed, for Hegel, symbols have no positive place in thought. When they appear in language (for example, in the metaphor), they actually “interrupt” the process of thought, rather than bring it forward. As he declares, “Whoever hides thoughts in symbols has no thoughts at all” (*VGP I*, p. 109). For Hegel, then, symbols are in a certain sense the negative of thought; they are the material thought must transform in order to *be* thought.

But spirit—*Geist*—is *not reducible to thought* (*das Denken*). The English translations of “*Geist*” as “mind” certainly have their basis, but they have also led to the terrible misconception that spirit is nothing but mental activity, pure intelligence, or an abstract entity that exists only at the peaks of speculative heights. For *Hegel*, however, this pure mental activity is only *part* of the activity of spirit. Formal thought or logic is necessary to philosophy, and philosophy is necessary for the clarity of spiritual reality and for freedom, but *spirit* is more than the *philosophical* knowledge of itself. As the following chapters will show, spirit is not just the act of transparent self-knowledge, but also the intuitive, representing, artistic, and religious acts of expression, acts which contain significant *symbolic* components. Thinking is an essential activity of spirit, but it cannot occur in isolation from other spiritual domains. For Hegel, spirit is the *whole* knowledge of itself in and through the other; it is the creation and maintenance of its self-identity in and through *the process* of self-differentiation. And precisely for this reason, spirit must know itself *amidst* the experience of self-diremption. Even when spirit signifies itself as a unity that supersedes this difference, it does not annul its internal, symbolic difference. It never reaches the point of being able to act *as if* it had not suffered a dispersal, *as if* it had not lost itself, *as if* its loss of self in the other *made no difference*. Hegel adamantly maintains that spirit would not be what it is—would not be the self-producing act that it is—without con-

taining a real, substantial difference within itself. Indeed, without this internal difference Hegel's absolute spirit would be nothing more than the empty void, "the night . . . in which all cows are black," which he so trenchantly criticizes in his preface to the *Phänomenologie des Geistes*. Spirit's experiential knowledge of itself as *not* perfectly coinciding with itself is essential to its wholeness. To be whole, spirit must *include* within itself the experience of division, of *not* being whole or wholly self-coincidental. Spirit must know itself in and through its various *symbolic* forms. It cannot just relate to its forms of manifestation in an arbitrary or indifferent manner, as the sign allows it to relate to its meaning, but must also identify itself through qualitative resemblances with what appears to be "other" than it. In other words, in addition to the sign, to which the meaning of spirit is indifferent, spirit needs forms of expression to which it is *not* indifferent. Spirit's act of signifying its self-identity is thus only one aspect of its whole truth; its self-mediation includes symbolization as well as signification. The sign's ability to posit a clear and simple identity must counterbalance the symbol's inevitable failure to express its intended meaning, but the symbol must also serve to allow spirit to undergo and contain its real, internal difference. Spirit cannot be or become *whole* without both elements.





## Chapter One



### The Symbol and the Sign in Hegel's Philosophy

As the introduction to this work details, relatively few of Hegel's commentators have focused attention on the role of either the sign or the symbol in his philosophy. Moreover, virtually all of those who have dealt with the sign, the symbol, or the relation between the two have assumed that Hegel maintains a simple, straightforward preference for the sign over the symbol. There are, of course, several good reasons for this assumption. For Hegel, the sign serves several functions that are absolutely necessary to spirit's development in self-knowledge. The sign plays a vital role, for example, in spirit's corporal<sup>1</sup> and linguistic expressions. It marks the highpoint of art and religion, and it constitutes the essence of philosophy's characteristic clarity. Nonetheless, as the following chapters aim to demonstrate, not only do these signifying mediations arise out of and build upon previous, equally essential symbolic ones, but even spirit's *absolute* expressions involve significant elements of the symbolic.

This chapter will lay the foundation for the development of this claim first by presenting Hegel's definitions of the symbol, the sign, and related terms. In the process, we will be able to make some important observations regarding Hegel's conceptions of the symbol and the sign. We will see, for example, that while Hegel's conceptions of these terms do not undergo significant development in the course of his lifetime, they do differ significantly from

most twentieth-century definitions of the terms. For the sake of clarity, then, the first part of this chapter will include a short section that briefly contrasts Hegel's definitions of the symbol and the sign to various modern and postmodern definitions of the terms.

The second part of the chapter will take up Derrida's critique of Hegel's conception of metaphor. Here, by contextualizing Hegel's statements regarding metaphor within his understanding of symbolic consciousness and the development of the artistic spirit, we will be able to distinguish between the aspects of Derrida's critique that apply to Hegel's concept of metaphor and those that do not, but which may still be relevant to a general critique of his notion of spirit. In addition, this discussion of the various forms of "conscious symbolism of the comparative kind" considered by Hegel will serve to concretize the more abstract definitions of the symbol discussed in the first section of the chapter. In the course of this discussion, we will come to see that even while Hegel recognizes a certain ambiguity as pertaining to these various symbolic forms, he deems them necessary to spirit's development. Indeed, as we will begin to see, Hegel's understanding of the symbol and its role in the mediation of spirit allows for more ambiguity than Derrida seems to acknowledge. Hegel's discussion of the poetic forms of expression shows, for example, that Hegel understands language not merely as a system of signs, but also as a medium through which meaning may be symbolically transferred and transformed.

## **I. Basic Terminology**

### *A. The Symbol and the Sign in the Hegelian Text*

Hegel presents his most complete discussions of the symbol and the sign in the *Philosophie des Geistes*, the third section of his *Enzyklopädie*, and in his *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*.<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, although Hegel's lectures on these topics took place over a period of many years and

while his thought certainly underwent some important developments, his basic conception of the symbol and the sign remained surprisingly stable.<sup>3</sup> Already by the time of his *Philosophische Propädeutik* Hegel had articulated the definitions of the symbol and the sign which would serve as the basis for his later, more thorough discussions of the terms. There Hegel defines the act of symbolization as the imagination's use of sensuous appearances or images to represent by analogy conceptions "of another kind"; the symbol conveys a meaning through the presentation of some quality or qualities that it has in common with that meaning (*NHS*, §154, p. 50).<sup>4</sup> The sign, by contrast, presents its meaning through an "arbitrary connection" with it (*NHS*, §155, p. 51).

In his lectures on aesthetics, as reported by his student Hotho, Hegel presents his definitions of the symbol and the sign in a similar way. Most simply stated, for Hegel, the symbol and the sign each have a meaning (*Bedeutung*) that is other than their immediate sensible expression (*Ausdruck*) (*Ä I*, p. 394). They differ, however, in the way in which their meaning and expression are linked. The symbol's expression is both identical to and different from its meaning, while the sign expresses its meaning by virtue of an indifference (*Gleichgültigkeit*) to its expression. In other words, the symbol communicates its meaning through an identity with it, whereas the sign works without recourse to such an identity. The symbol refers to its meaning through the qualities of its immediate sensible expression, while the sign manifests its meaning through an arbitrarily established connection with its immediate sensible expression. Accordingly, to use Hegel's examples, the lion and the fox symbolize magnanimity and cunning because they "themselves possess the very qualities whose meaning they are supposed to express" (*besitzen für sich die Eigenschaften selbst, deren Bedeutung sie ausdrücken sollen*) (*Ä I*, p. 395). By contrast, according to Hegel, the colors in a flag signify the nation they represent because they "contain . . . no quality which might be in common with their meaning" (*in ihr selber*

*keine Qualität, welche ihr gemeinschaftlich wäre mit ihrer Bedeutung*) (Ä I, p. 395).

While Hotho's compilation of notes does not distinguish between the various semesters in which Hegel taught the aesthetics, Annemarie Gethmann-Siefert's recently published edition of Hegel's *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Kunst*, which is based upon Hotho's 1823 lecture notes, shows that Hegel introduced these concepts of the symbol and the sign into his lectures on aesthetics at least as early as that year. In distinction from the sign, which "does not pertain to itself," but only to its "given meaning" (*gegebene Bedeutung*), the symbol "contains in its externality . . . the content of the representation that it is supposed to present" (VPK 1823, p. 119). The same basic definition of the symbol and the sign also occurs throughout the existing manuscripts of other students who heard Hegel's lectures on aesthetics. The earliest existing manuscripts, dating from 1820/21 and compiled by Ascheberg, Terborg, and Middendorf, similarly distinguish the sign from the symbol: "The sign is an externality, completely indifferent to its meaning, but in the symbol the representation must be immanent" (VÄ 1820/21; p. 111). In Griesheim's rendition of Hegel's 1826 lectures, the symbol is described as "an existence that is immediately present or given, but which is not supposed to be taken only in this immediate way, but is to be taken as brought to meaning."<sup>5</sup> There Hegel calls the symbol a "sensuous existence that must contain within it the property that is supposed to be expressed," but which also has a meaning that is not present in the immediate sensuous appearance. Again the sign is contrasted to the symbol because it represents its meaning in an arbitrary way.<sup>6</sup> In Libelt's notes from Hegel's 1828/29 lectures, the symbol is defined as "the sensuous form of a general representation," and it is said to be "adequate" and "at once not adequate" to the meaning it represents.<sup>7</sup> It is, in other words, both identical to and different from its meaning. Here again the sign is distinguished by virtue of the fact that it enacts a merely arbitrary connection, bearing no significant identity with its meaning.<sup>8</sup>

In his *Philosophie des Geistes* Hegel defines the symbol and the sign in the same general way.<sup>9</sup> There, as he develops his concept of the symbol in the course of his discussion of subjective theoretical spirit, he discusses the symbol as a product of the associating imagination. The imagination creates symbols by “subsuming (*Subsumtion*) the particular under the general” (*ENZ III*, §§455–56). Working on the basis of resemblance, the intelligence gives meaning to its intuitions by identifying them with abstract conceptions. Therefore, at least some of the qualities of the symbol reflect the meaning attributed to it. The case is otherwise with the sign, for its meaning is completely indifferent to the externality of its intuitable characteristics:

The sign is different from the symbol, an intuition whose own determinateness (*Bestimmtheit*) according to its essence and concept is more or less the content which it expresses as symbol; with the sign as such, however, the particular content of the intuition and that of the sign have nothing to do with each other (*geht . . . einander nichts an*) (*ENZ III*, §458)

Thus, while the symbol at least partly identifies its meaning through the qualities of its expression, the sign designates its meaning through the intelligence's abstraction from the sign's external qualities. Although the sign's expression is indeed “other” than its meaning, it presents no significant difference from its intended meaning. As we have already seen, according to Hegel, the sensuous immediacy that functions as a sign has “the essential determination of being only as superseded (*die wesentliche Bestimmung, nur als aufgehobene zu sein*)” (*ENZ III*, §459). In so far as the sign is a sign, the immediate qualities of its sensible expression are discounted; they have nothing to do with the sign's meaning—either positively or negatively. The meaning conveyed by the US flag, for example, would be no different if the flag's immediate presence were round, green, and velvet instead of rectangular, striped, and cloth. In either case, it signifies the US nation simply by virtue of its being defined

as that which does so. Of course, by Hegel's terminology, the characteristics of the flag that were chosen for particular reasons (in this case, fifty stars for fifty states) would have to be said to symbolize their meaning. Nevertheless, the flag as a whole still functions as a sign because it accomplishes its meaning independently of such symbolic connections; it conveys its meaning even if these symbolic connections are forgotten or never learned at all.

Clearly for Hegel the symbol is more closely tied to what is simply given in intuition than the sign is. In its act of symbolic representation, the intelligence works with "the given content of its images," and is therefore "still conditioned, only relatively free" (*noch bedingte, nur relativ freie*) (ENZ III §457, Zus.). By contrast, in its sign-making activity, the intelligence disregards the content of the images it receives and acts independently of these determinations: "In that the general representation, now free from the content of the image, makes itself into something intuitable in a manner arbitrary to its chosen external material (*in einem willkürlich von ihr gewählten äusserlichen Stoffe*), it produces what one must call a *sign* in specific distinction from a symbol" (ENZ III, §457, Zus.). The symbol, Hegel says, is "an image" that can be considered in a "double" way: either with respect to "the immediacy of its intuition" or with respect to its "sense" or meaning (*Sinn*). The sign, by contrast, has an existence outside of the intelligence's interior act of representation, but it is nonetheless to be considered only with respect to the meaning arbitrarily attributed to it (*Phil G*, p. 207).

In short: the sign's immediate expression bears no significance besides the one *assigned* to it; its meaning is established without reference to its particular expression and its material element is "an in itself meaningless indication" (*eine für sich bedeutungslose Bezeichnung*) (Ä I, pp. 143–45). This indifference between meaning and expression, however, does not mean that the sign expresses no real identity or difference. Quite to the contrary, according to Hegel, it is precisely on account of this indifference *between meaning and form* that the sign becomes able to specify

identities and differences *within meaning*. Precisely because signs are based upon a *clarified* relation between meaning and expression—that is, upon the conventional agreement to disregard the difference involved in this relation—they direct the attention of their interpreters to distinctions among the meanings assigned to them.

In his *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, Hegel suggests that the terms “symbol” and “sign” each may be used in a loose sense as well; both terms may be used simply to mean an expression that stands for some other meaning. Accordingly, when Hegel first defines the symbol, he does so in this very broad sense: “The symbol in general is something that is immediately present to intuition or a given external existence, which, however, is not to be understood as it immediately presents itself, but rather in a further, more general sense” (Ä I, p. 394). In this loose sense, even that expression which is completely indifferent (*gleichgültig*) to its meaning—that is, even a sign—may be termed “symbolic,” as Hegel himself implies (Ä I, p. 395). However, after acknowledging this most general sense of the term, Hegel delineates the word “symbol” in its more characteristic sense. Here, although he uses the terminology of aesthetics, his definition of the symbol corresponds to his definition of it in the *Enzyklopädie*. What “independently constitutes the symbol in its particular form” (*in seiner eigentümlichen Form selbstständig ausbildet*), Hegel says, is its “sublimity” (*Erhabenheit*), the fact that the symbol’s intended meaning exists “outside” its immediate sensuous appearance (Ä I, p. 393–94). As Hegel explains, when the Idea (*Idee*) is presented in symbolic form, it is presented in an abstract and indeterminate way, such that the Idea itself “exceeds (*überragt*) its external existence (*äusserliches Dasein*) instead of being fully enclosed (*geschlossen*) and manifested in it” (Ä I, p. 393–94). In contrast to the sign whose expression is so indifferent to its meaning that it does not distort or detract from it, the symbol’s meaning is connected to the qualities of its immediate expression in an unclarified and incomplete manner. Characteristically, then, the symbol maintains a difference between its expression and its meaning



even as it aims to identify the two (Ä I, pp. 393–94). Obviously, this more restricted sense of the symbol opposes the sign, whose immediate expression does not exceed its intended meaning in Hegels' view.

Hegel occasionally uses the term "sign" in a very general sense as well. Broadly speaking, a sign is simply that which indicates "more" than its immediate presence. Initially assuming this loose terminology, Hegel remarks that the symbol is "first of all a sign" (Ä I, p. 394). However, he quickly qualifies this statement by adding that the symbol is not a "mere sign" (*blosses Zeichen*) and by explaining the operative difference between the two terms (Ä I, pp. 394–95). While the sign enacts "only a completely arbitrary connection" (*nur eine ganz willkürliche Verknüpfung*) between its meaning and its expression, the symbol is not a "mere indifferent (*gleichgültiges*) sign," but an expression that in some way identifies its meaning through a quality it has in common with it (Ä I, p. 395). Thus, despite the fact that Hegel sometimes employs the terms "symbol" and "sign" in a general and indeterminate way, what primarily concerns him—and what shall concern us here—is the way in which the two terms *differ*. Characteristically, the symbol's expression partly identifies its meaning, while the sign fully expresses its meaning through an arbitrary connection with it.

Because the sign functions on the basis of this indifference, it supersedes several sorts of confusion to which the symbol by definition lends itself. More specifically, because the symbol works on the basis of both an identity with and a difference from its meaning, it leaves room for three different kinds of misinterpretation. In the first place, the symbol cannot express the whole of its meaning. By definition, it does not communicate everything that pertains to the significance it is intended to convey; it only communicates those aspects of its meaning with which it has identical qualities. Water, for example, may symbolize new life through its identity with it—that is, through its capacity to cleanse, nourish, and rejuvenate. However, as the colorless, shapeless substance that it is, water cannot communicate

everything about new life; it may not convey, for example, the vividness and fragility that pertain to new life.

The symbol's difference from its meaning results in a second, ambiguity-producing consequence. Not only does the symbol fail to communicate some aspects of its intended meaning, but it also communicates aspects of its expression that do *not* pertain to that meaning at all and that may even contradict it. For example, water intended to symbolize new life may accidentally suggest images of flooding, swimming, or drowning. The symbol, then, is limited in two opposing respects: on the one hand, it cannot communicate the whole of its intended significance; on the other hand, it may communicate aspects of itself that do not relate to its intended significance. In other words, due to the difference between the qualities of the symbol's expression (*Ausdruck*) and its intended meaning (*Bedeutung*)—a difference which the symbol by definition sets up and sustains—the symbol says *both more and less* than its meaning. Although this difference is part of what makes the symbol a symbol (water, for example, could not symbolize new life if it were not in some sense other than it), it also represents the symbol's functional limit. Because the symbol's expression does not fully coincide with its meaning, it cannot present it in a precise manner. The symbol cannot convey its meaning unambiguously because it does not exhibit or clarify *the basis* of its identity with and difference from its meaning.

By contrast, the sign supersedes these ambiguities because it functions on the basis of a pure, arbitrary, and explicit identity. The sign runs no risk of confusion because it only *is a sign* to the extent that all the qualities of its expression, which could contribute to confusion, are discounted. Whatever meanings the sign might have had as an intuition (that is, as a result of the qualities of its external immediacy) are irrelevant to its function and existence as a sign. Consequently, there is no real or *significant* difference between what the sign is intended to mean and what its physical expression conveys. Taken as such, the sign bears no qualities other than its signifying ability; it expresses nothing other than the meaning arbitrarily attributed to it

as a sign. In other words, the sign is only a sign to the extent that its meaning is explicitly agreed upon by all possible interpreters. Among those initiated to a given sign system, there is no possibility of mistaking a sign's meaning. The designation of  $H_2O$  for water, for example, risks no confusion among those in the scientific community who have agreed *to let* it mean nothing more and nothing less than the chemical composition of water. Thus, by Hegel's definitions, the symbol and the sign differ from one another in a very significant way: while the symbol expresses *both more and less* than its intended meaning, the sign expresses *only and all* of it.

A third way in which the symbol is ambiguous lies in the fact that its immediate presence contains no intrinsic indication that it is to be taken as a symbol at all (*Ä I*, pp. 397–99). In other words, there is nothing inherent in the symbol's immediate existence that communicates whether it is to be taken in its immediate sense or in its symbolic sense; there is nothing within the symbol's given expression that reveals that it is meant to be taken *as* a symbol. To be able to recognize that an immediate intuition is intended in a symbolic sense, one must know something about the context of the symbolic expression or about the worldview of those employing it. Thus, as Hegel explains, if one encounters a triangular figure hung in the center of the wall of a Christian church, one may surmise that it bears the symbolic meaning of the trinity. However, if one encounters the same triangular figure in another location or among a non-Christian people, one must not only doubt the particularity of its symbolic meaning, but also whether it is meant to have a symbolic meaning at all (*Ä I*, pp. 399–400). This ambiguity, however, applies in a certain sense to the sign as well. In his consideration of the triangle, Hegel also notes that its immediate presence does not communicate whether it should be taken as a symbol or as a sign (*Ä I*, p. 399). Nothing in the immediate presence of the symbol or sign distinguishes the one from the other. What distinguishes the two, rather, is the way in which they are *set up*—that is, the way in which they are *meant* to be taken or read.

Granted any given intuition, we cannot know of its symbolic or signifying function unless we also know whether or not a meaning beyond its immediacy has been attributed to it. In order to recognize an immediate intuition as a symbol or sign, we must have some awareness of the context of the intuition as well as of the conventions of the people in which the intuition is found.

The symbol and the sign, nonetheless, may be distinguished with regard to this point. The meaning of the symbol is always at least *partly found*: it lies within the content of the symbol's immediate expression. The meaning of the sign, by contrast, is *simply assigned*: it results from an arbitrarily established connection. Consequently, as we have already noted, in the case of the sign, there is no need for any resemblance between its meaning and expression. The word "fox," for example, signifies the particular animal, even though the black lines and white spaces that form the word and the tones that pronounce it have no quality in common with an actual fox. The sign may just as well be "zzz" or "*Fuchs*" as it is, in fact, in German. We could even take a cloud or a ball or the color purple to be a sign of a fox. The point is that with the sign *it does not matter* what intuition or external mark we use. The meaning of the sign supersedes (*hebt auf*) the intuition that serves as its existential basis and theoretical precondition because the being and meaning of the sign lies wholly *in its being established*, in its *being set up* as a sign. Obviously, the sign cannot work without *some* form of expression, but it is distinguished from the symbol by the fact that its expression gains its meaning purely through convention. As Hegel claims, the meaning of signs can be established only by repetition and rule (*ENZ III*, §457; *Ä I*, p. 399). Thus, whereas a symbol may function without explicit social agreement, the sign's ability to express its meaning *requires* that this meaning be explicitly shared among its users. This greater degree of explicitness does not, however, mean that the sign is more community-based than the symbol. Within his system of sciences, Hegel locates symbolizing and sign-making after spirit's

anthropological and phenomenological development, and thus suggests that both activities presuppose a certain degree of social experience.

This distinction between the symbol and the sign leads to another, related one. While the meaning of a symbol may be recognized across cultural understandings, the meaning of a sign requires access to the rule of its institution. Various cultures, for example, may observe independently that a fox is cunning and so employ the fox as a symbol for cunning. Then, if one of these cultures encounters another, it may be able to recognize the meaning of this symbol. By contrast (except in the case of pure accident), no two cultures could come up with the same *sign* for a fox. (If two cultures developed the same word for a specific reason, for example, on the basis of onomatopoeia<sup>10</sup> or some other qualitative relation between meaning and expression, the word would not be an example of a pure sign). The meaning of a sign is therefore *exclusive*: no one outside the community of users could guess its meaning. The symbol, however, does not necessarily exclude 'foreign' interpreters because it allows for the possibility that even those who are not explicitly told of the symbol's meaning may solve its "riddle" by recognizing the identity of its meaning and expression. But the symbol is not necessarily more accessible than the sign. Two different cultures could just as well discover *different* meanings in the same symbol, in which case a meeting of the two cultures would lead to a great misunderstanding. For Hegel, the only way to ensure mutual understanding would be to agree explicitly upon a common meaning for an immediate presence—that is, to create a sign.

### *B. Twentieth-century Understandings of the Symbol and the Sign*

Hegel's definitions of the symbol and sign are not the definitions of the terms that most late-twentieth-century theorists tend to take for granted. This fact is extremely important to bear in mind in the course of this discussion of "the symbolic mediation of spirit." During this analysis, we

will be referring to Hegel's own definitions and use of the terms "sign" and "symbol," definitions and applications that differ substantially from contemporary psycholinguistic understandings of them. It must be clear from the beginning that here we are not referring to the "symbolic" and the "signifying" or "semiotic" in the senses developed by those such as Freud, Saussure, Peirce, Lacan, Kristeva, or Gadamer. For this reason, we must take brief note of the differences between Hegel's definitions and these contemporary conceptions.

As is the case with Hegel's symbol, Freud's symbol also functions on the basis of a resemblance to a meaning that it cannot fully express. However, whereas Hegel's symbol indicates its meaning through a positive identity with it, the meaning of Freud's symbol may derive from its opposite such that something accidental may even stand for what is essential.<sup>11</sup> Like Hegel, Freud also understands the symbol to be a kind of intermediary between consciousness and unconsciousness. But the two theorists understand this mediation in very different ways. For Hegel, the symbol serves as the primary means through which the intersubjective whole of spirit begins to recognize itself during the course of its early historical development. Before spirit achieves full self-consciousness—that is, before it is aware of its intrinsic unity with that which appears to be other than it—it experiences this identity through its symbolizations. Gradually spirit gains awareness of the limitations of this symbolic form and becomes able to explicate the meanings merely suggested by its symbolizations. At this point, spirit still maintains the use of symbols, but it does not suffer their limitation in the same way. Having conscious awareness of the necessity of a moment of unconsciousness *within its very act of consciousness* (that is to say, of the ultimate unity of its self-constituting activity of knowing with what at first appeared as other than it), it becomes able to recognize the identifications of symbols as a positive and necessary part of its own activity. Thus, for Hegel, symbols represent consciousness's *limited attempt to express meaning*. By contrast, for Freud, they represent the

unconscious's *success at hiding meaning* from conscious awareness. Moreover, Freud does not assert, as Hegel does, that the real meaning of a symbol may be made fully explicit through a process of philosophical reflection and speculation. Rather, in Freud's view, the relatively "stable" meanings of symbols may be partially uncovered through an analytic, associative method, but they may never be fully comprehended.<sup>12</sup>

Ferdinand de Saussure, widely considered the founder of modern linguistics, does in fact preserve the basic distinction between the symbol and the sign, which Hegel employs. For Saussure, as for Hegel, symbols are characterized by the fact that their meaning and expression are not related in an "entirely arbitrary" manner.<sup>13</sup> Instead, they "show at least a vestige of natural connexion [*sic*]" between its meaning and expression.<sup>14</sup> Accordingly, and in line with Hegel, Saussure defines the sign as that which bears a conventional, arbitrary relation between its meaning and expression—or, in Saussure's terminology, between the "signified" (*signifié*) and the "signifying" (*signifiant*).<sup>15</sup> In contrast to Hegel, however, Saussure insists that the meaning of the sign *cannot be changed at will*: the meaning of a sign is always determined in advance by the linguistic community and by its relation to other signs.<sup>16</sup> In Hegel's view, philosophical thought *can* transform the meaning of a sign through an act of intention once it has learned a certain capacity of abstraction.

On the surface, Peirce's definition of the sign appears similar to Hegel's as well. For Peirce, a sign is "something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity" and thereby creates an "equivalent" that calls for interpretation.<sup>17</sup> For Peirce, however, the symbol is unambiguously *a kind of sign*. More specifically, it is a concretely existing "sinsign" that refers to its meaning through a law of association conventionally agreed upon.<sup>18</sup> In this way, his symbol actually corresponds to Hegel's sign, while his "icon," another kind of sinsign, parallels Hegel's symbol because it refers to its meaning directly through the particular qualities of its embodiment.

Lacan's and Kristeva's uses of "the symbolic" derive from different aspects of the psychoanalytic and semiotic traditions. Generally speaking, both theorists use the term to refer to that which is constituted through a closed system of meaning as opposed to a realm beyond meaning—"the Real" in Lacan's terminology and "the semiotic" in Kristeva's. Their use of the term "symbolic" is actually closer to Hegel's definition of the sign than to his definition of the symbol since Hegel's sign also constitutes its meaning. However, for Lacan and Kristeva, the effect of the symbolic is conditioned by that which stands *outside of meaning*, whereas, for Hegel, nothing really "is" outside of its meaning. Kristeva also uses the term "sign" (*le signifiant*) and allows that it be considered "arbitrary," but for her, the sign is part of a larger symbolic system and thus does not represent a direct correspondence with a fixed meaning but rather a meaning that is constantly transformed through its relations to other signs.<sup>19</sup> Hegel too allows that a given sign may have more than one meaning, but he maintains that these various meanings may be systematically distinguished through the science of logic.

Gadamer's concept of the symbol differs starkly from Hegel's. In both *Truth and Method*<sup>20</sup> and "The Relevance of the Beautiful"<sup>21</sup> Gadamer traces the concept of symbol back to its early Greek etymological and cultural roots. "In its original technical sense," according to Gadamer, "the symbol represented something like a sort of pass used in the ancient world: something in and through which we recognize (*erkennen*) someone already known to us."<sup>22</sup> More specifically, the word "symbol" named a kind of token of remembrance (*Erinnerungsscherbe*) that a host would give to a guest upon the guest's departure as a promise of future welcoming. The host would break something in half, give one piece to the guest, and keep the other piece. The two halves, in their original unity and in their ability to fit together again, would then represent the solidarity between the host and the guest and would serve as the means by which descendants of the host and guest could recognize one another. According to Gadamer, this "*tessera hospitalis*" "demonstrates and visibly



presents" the "belonging together" of the parts in the whole. Thus, Gadamer's symbol, like Hegel's, suggests its meaning through a resemblance to that meaning. However, on Gadamer's terms, the symbol also makes its meaning *present*. Furthermore, in contrast to Hegel, who sees the sign as the medium through which meaning best presents itself, Gadamer regards the symbol's mediating capacity as superior. For Gadamer, the sign merely *indicates* or points to something that is absent, while the symbol actually lets the meaning "be there." He explains, "The representational function of a symbol is not merely to point to something that is not present. Instead, a symbol manifests the presence of something that really is present."<sup>23</sup> For Hegel, the symbol is necessarily something other than what it symbolizes, but for Gadamer, the symbol is specifically *not* other than what it symbolizes. It is the very presenting of its meaning. In this sense Gadamer's definitions of the terms reverse Hegel's completely.

## II. Can Philosophy Conceive the Symbolic?

Although Derrida treats "metaphor" as representative of the symbolic forms of figure, myth, fable, and allegory, his criticism of Hegel's concept of metaphor focuses on those passages in Hegel's *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik* that discuss metaphor in a much more limited sense. In order to consider Hegel's position adequately and to treat Derrida's objection fairly, we therefore need to consider not just Hegel's discussion of metaphor, but his entire discussion of "conscious symbolism of the comparative type." There, in addition to metaphor, Hegel discusses a number of other kinds of literary expressions and figures, including the fable and the allegory.<sup>24</sup> Still, this accounting for the difference in definition between the two thinkers will not be enough to authorize an application of Derrida's criticisms directly to Hegel's text. Quite to the contrary, we will need to bear in mind the fact that Hegel's treatment of these symbolic forms occurs in the context of a discussion of a certain stage

in the development of artistic consciousness: he considers these symbolic forms primarily as the result of the poetic drive to express spiritual meaning in new ways. The next section of this chapter will show how a consideration of this particular context of Hegel's discussion relieves Hegel of the burden of some of Derrida's criticisms. We will see, for example, that Hegel defines each symbolic form distinctly and that he acknowledges them to have more ambiguity than Derrida recognizes. Then, in the final section, we will consider Derrida's analysis of metaphor in greater detail in order to point out the ways in which Derrida's criticisms may still have a bearing on Hegel's understanding of metaphor as well as his concepts of philosophy and of spirit.

#### *A. Conscious Symbolism of the Comparative Type*

In his lectures on aesthetics, Hegel classifies metaphor as belonging to the symbolic form of art. There, after defining the symbol, he suggests that symbolization itself constitutes a particular form of art or a kind of "pre-art" (*Vorkunst*). Since the symbol, by his definition, sustains a difference between meaning and expression, it falls short of art's ideal fusion of content and form. Nonetheless, because the symbol endeavors to unite content and form, Hegel sees it as constituting the notional and historic "beginning" of art. The symbolic *suggests* something of the life of spirit, even though it cannot manifest spirit in its harmony, wholeness, and truth (*Ä I*, p. 393). Hegel divides symbolic art into three categories according to the particular ways in which they relate content and form. The first two forms, "unconscious" symbolism<sup>25</sup> and "sublime" symbolism, constitute crucial stages in spirit's artistic development and will therefore be treated in chapter three's general discussion of art. The third form, "conscious symbolism of the comparative kind," which includes the fable, allegory, and metaphor, is to be distinguished from these other two forms in that it constitutes a kind of interruption in spirit's historical development, even as it remains the product of artistic consciousness. Rather than coinciding with any

particular cultural spirit, these symbolic comparisons belong to poetic consciousness as such and so, considered as a whole, transcend any particular historical period of spirit's development.<sup>26</sup>

Conscious symbolism differs significantly from the previous two kinds of symbolism in another important sense as well. According to Hegel, by the time spirit reaches this level of development, it has realized that the meaning it was seeking to express in earlier forms of symbolism cannot be fully expressed through symbolization. In other words, it has become conscious of the fact that the symbol sustains a difference between meaning and expression and therefore is incapable of expressing art's ideal unity of form and content. Therefore, instead of trying to express the whole of spirit, symbolic consciousness of this kind restricts itself to various finite particulars and seeks only to express "some determined and limited meaning" (*Ä I*, pp. 486–88). Instead of trying to express the absolute symbolically, artistic consciousness employs symbols as "adornment[s] and accessor[ies]" of spirit (Knox trans., p. 380; compare *Ä I*, p. 488). In this way these forms of comparison affirm the priority of spiritual significance over formal expression: artistic consciousness has become aware that its modes of expression are mere *means* to spiritual meaning. Although Hegel judges these symbolic forms to be limited because they fail to unite content and form and thus to communicate their intended meaning fully, he nonetheless recognizes each as having its specific value and purpose.

Hegel presents the various comparative forms of symbolism according to the degree to which they explicitly communicate both their intended meaning and the inherent limitation of their form. In his system the more primitive forms of comparison begin with an external, immediate situation and then add significance to it, while those belonging to a more sophisticated artistic consciousness start out with a certain significance and then make this significance concrete (*Ä I*, pp. 489–90). Examples of the first kind of comparison include the fable, parable, proverb, apologue, and metamorphosis.<sup>27</sup> According to Hegel, when the poet uses

these kinds of symbolic forms, he or she begins with an immediate situation or circumstance and then attributes symbolic meaning to it. In the course of so doing, however, the poet is not fully aware of the extent to which his or her subjectivity actually constitutes the comparison. The poet simply sees the meaning as inhering in the situation he or she presents. Therefore, although these forms belong to the domain of conscious symbolism, they testify to a lower degree of consciousness than the forms of comparison that begin with an already clarified and distinct meaning.

The first form of conscious symbolism that Hegel discusses is the fable (*die Fabel*). According to Hegel, the fable begins with a concrete situation in nature and presents it in such a way that it conveys a moral significance (*Ä I*, p. 492).<sup>28</sup> As Hegel explains, the fable presents a course of events from nature, usually the animal world, "as a symbol for a general meaning regarding the circle of human activities and dealings" (*Ä I*, p. 492). At this level of symbolic consciousness, the immediate situation of the natural world represents a spiritual significance, but it does not show this significance to be *expressly* spiritual (*Ä I*, pp. 492–93). Moreover, the fact that the fable allows for the abstraction of its moral indicates the fable's inability to fuse its content and form completely (*Ä I*, pp. 492–94). Like the symbol in general, the fable remains substantially ambiguous; it conceals elements of its meaning even as it seeks to reveal this meaning (*Ä I*, p. 499). Nonetheless, according to Hegel, the fable serves the important function of presenting ethical teachings in an easily accessible form (*Ä I*, p. 494).

In a similar way, the parable (*die Parabel*), the proverb (*das Sprichwort*), the apologue (*der Apolog*), and the metamorphosis (*die Verwandlung*) work by imparting a general ethical or practical significance to a mundane occurrence. For Hegel these forms of comparison constitute an advance over the fable because they portray humans directly, rather than using the natural world to represent the human world (*Ä I*, p. 503). As a result, these forms progress toward a greater range of content and a greater ability to clarify meaning and manifest spirit (*Ä I*, pp. 502–503). The parable

takes a particular situation from everyday life and implies its connection with a broader, moral meaning, while the proverb deals with a more limited scope but expresses its meaning more explicitly than the parable. The apologue differs from these two forms in its combination of a relatively broad scope with a fairly explicit expression of meaning (Ä I, p. 504). For Hegel, however, the metamorphosis represents the greatest advance in artistic consciousness because it explicitly opposes the spiritual to the natural. By portraying the transformation of a human figure into a particular natural object such as an animal, a flower, a spring, or a rock, the metamorphosis clearly shows the superiority of the spiritual and the degradation of the natural (Ä I, p. 506). Like the fable, these symbolic forms allow moral principles to be presented in ways that may be easily understood, though they only manifest spirit to a limited degree.

According to Hegel, the symbol's significance more clearly predominates over its expression in modes of comparison that have the symbol's inner significance as their starting point. These forms, which include the riddle (*das Rätsel*), the allegory (*die Allegorie*), the metaphor (*die Metapher*), the image (*das Bild*) and the simile (*das Gleichnis*), have a meaning that is already "present" to consciousness as their point of departure. Therefore, when consciousness creates its symbolic form, the form itself appears expressly as the means (*Mittel*) of the intended significance (Ä I, p. 507). Accordingly, Hegel deems these expressions mere "decorations" which could be rephrased in prosaic terms once they have been clarified by their context (Ä I, p. 508). They do not essentially further spirit's knowledge of itself, but simply embellish spirit's experience of a truth it already has (Ä I, p. 508). Moreover, according to Hegel, the connection between the significance and expression no longer appears as "in and for itself necessary"; rather the creator of these symbolic forms freely chooses the external expressions that he or she correlates to the meaning held in consciousness (Ä I, p. 507–508). Since this connection is symbolic, it has at least some determinate basis: the artist chooses the form on account of some identity it has with the

meaning. However, since a wide range of possible identifications are available to the poet, the connection between form and content is relatively arbitrary. The particular symbolic expression does not arise entirely from the subject matter itself, but is strongly influenced by the poetic subjectivity that employs it (Ä I, p. 507). Despite these limitations, however, Hegel acknowledges these symbolic forms to have many important functions.

Hegel sharply distinguishes *the riddle* as a form of conscious symbolism from the riddle of the ancient Egyptians, which he describes as "essentially enigmatic." Whereas Egyptian consciousness posed riddles to itself that it could not solve, the conscious form of the riddle develops out of an already known answer; its form and expression derive from an already clarified significance (Ä I, p. 509). In other words, the one who presents a conscious riddle purposely chooses a form that will confuse those who will try to interpret it (Ä I, p. 509). Such a riddler arranges the facts of an immediate situation so that they will distract from their wider significance even while they maintain a relation to it (Ä I, p. 510). Therefore, although the answer to the riddle is known by the one who poses it, it is not immediately apparent in the riddle's presentation. On the contrary, this kind of symbolic form partially conceals its meaning even as it hints at it: it obscures its significance exactly as it clarifies and betrays it (Ä I, pp. 510–11). According to Hegel, though earlier cultures used this form for fairly serious purposes, modern culture tends to use it primarily for the sake of entertainment (Ä I, pp. 510–11).

Like the riddle, *the allegory* begins with a preconceived significance that it compares to and connects with a concrete situation. It too "tries to bring the determined qualities of a general representation closer to sensible concrete objects through related qualities" (Ä I, p. 511). Nonetheless, the allegory differs from the riddle in two important ways. First of all, it is not the product of an intentional concealment. Quite to the contrary, the allegorist attempts to reveal the preconceived significance as completely as he or she can. Every external immediacy and sensible existent in

the allegory is formed in such a way that its general intended meaning may become as transparent as possible (*Ä I*, p. 511). Secondly, whereas the riddle's significance is fairly determinate, the allegory's significance remains very general. Moreover, though Hegel makes it clear that the allegory functions as a symbol, he notes that the relatively weak identification between its general meaning and its particular form makes its form function almost like a sign. Since the meaning of an allegory is determined in abstraction, before its form is developed, the allegory presupposes a great rift between its figure and its meaning (*Ä I*, pp. 512–13). Hegel therefore concludes that allegorical personifications attain only "the empty form of subjectivity"; though they may be given numerous human qualities, they can never reach the determination of concrete individuality (*Ä I*, pp. 512–13). Instead of representing a real subject that would unify itself through its differentiated qualities, the abstract allegorical subject can in the end only be identified with a single quality at once. As Hegel says, it is reduced to the status of a mere attribute (*Ä I*, pp. 512–13). Still, even as he declares this lack of individuality to be a defect of the allegorical mode, Hegel remarks that it does fulfill its own purpose in history. The allegory satisfies the particular need of medieval Christianity to give concrete manifestation to universal truths (*Ä I*, p. 514).

Since Derrida understands "metaphor" in a broad sense so as to include a number of these symbolic forms, it is fitting to consider his criticisms of Hegel in this wider context. As we saw in the introduction, Derrida criticizes Hegel's concept of metaphor on several accounts: 1) he disagrees that a metaphor's context reveals its meaning completely; 2) he rejects the idea that metaphors are inessential to the meanings they are supposed to express; 3) he objects to the erasure of the sensible image intrinsic to the concept of metaphor; and 4) he denies that the difference between the literal and metaphorical employment of words can be easily established in living languages.

Here, first of all, it is crucial to note that Hegel does not use the term "metaphor" to refer to the symbolic in general,

as Derrida does. As we shall see, some of Derrida's criticisms do apply to Hegel's concept of *metaphor*, but they do *not* apply to Hegel's concept of the symbol or even to most of the symbolic forms he discusses in this section of his aesthetics. Yet Derrida's broad construal of the term "metaphor" detracts from the fact that Hegel actually does understand *the symbolic* to include much ambiguity. Hegel freely admits, for example, that the symbol does not reveal its meaning completely and that it may not even be clear whether a given immediacy is to be taken as a symbol or not. Indeed Hegel even allows that a given symbol may be essential to the expression of its meaning, in so far as it is very often the case that the meaning intended has not yet been conceived in any other way. Moreover, while the symbol certainly indicates a meaning beyond its immediate expression, it does not erase its sensible element. In contrast to the sign, the symbol functions *in and through* its sensuousness. What this means, then, is that Derrida's criticisms regarding Hegel's theory of metaphor should be restricted to Hegel's statements about metaphor in his aesthetics even though Derrida himself understands "metaphor" to refer to the symbolic in a more general sense. No general conclusions about the role of the symbolic in Hegel's system may be drawn from Hegel's theory of metaphor or Derrida's criticism of it.

Most of Derrida's criticisms do not apply to Hegel's specific concepts of the fable, parable, proverb, apologue, or metamorphosis either. Hegel makes it clear that in each case, the sensible images used are essential to the expression of meaning, and these symbols convey their meaning with only a limited degree of clarity. Nor is it clear in the case of parable, proverb and apologue, whether these forms are to be taken in the figurative or literal sense, since each of these forms so thoroughly mixes its meaning with its immediate presentation. Only in the cases of the fable and the metamorphosis is the fact that the forms are supposed to be taken symbolically relatively clear since the fable uses animal forms to represent human situations, and since the metamorphosis transforms the human figure into a natural one.



Nor do most of Derrida's criticisms apply to the forms of symbolism that begin on the side of internal meaning. Neither the riddle nor the allegory can afford to erase their sensible, figurative element since each of these symbolic forms works *in and through* this element. Nor does either symbolic form work to reveal its meaning completely, without confusion. In fact, both forms function *by virtue of* an ambiguity as to whether they are to be taken literally or symbolically. The confusion of the two dimensions is often the very life of the riddle, and it is the basis of the allegorical figure as such. Derrida's implication that Hegel maintains that these forms are inessential to their meaning does hold, however. For, as we have just seen, Hegel conceives the riddle and the allegory as expressing a *meaning already clear* to the poet who uses the figures. As Hegel points out, a riddle could not work if its creator did not already know its answer, and an allegory would not be an allegory if the poet did not know what he or she was trying to represent. For this reason, Hegel views these figures as inessential to their significance: the meaning that underlies these figurative forms could also be expressed in a nonfigurative way. Presumably, then, for Hegel, one could state the theology of the *Divine Comedy* in philosophical terms. Whether, in his view, anything "essential" would be lost in the process and whether philosophy could avoid using metaphors altogether are questions we will address in our final chapter when we consider the relation between philosophy and the symbolic forms of art and religion. For now it is sufficient to note that Hegel's aesthetics understands the symbol and various symbolic forms to be ambiguous in ways not acknowledged by Derrida's critique.

### *B. Metaphor in Philosophical Aesthetics*

According to Hegel, the metaphor, the image, and the simile each combine the allegory's clarity with the riddle's attractiveness (*Ä I*, p. 516). Indeed, for Hegel, these symbolic forms represent a certain peak in the poet's use of comparison. More than the previous forms of symbolic consciousness, metaphor, image, and simile explicitly communicate

their intended meaning and the inherent limitation of their symbolic form so long as they are considered in their proper context. According to Hegel, the poet uses these forms to express an *already known* meaning; the artist begins with a certain significance and then identifies this significance with a "comparable, similar appearance of concrete reality" (*in einer damit vergleichbaren ähnlichen Erscheinung der konkreten Wirklichkeit*) (Ä I, p. 516). Since the meaning is already clear to the poet, he or she has no difficulty in communicating it with a similar clarity: "The meaning, which stands clearly before consciousness is illustrated in the form of a related externality so that . . . no deciphering task arises, but rather a figurativeness (*Bildlichkeit*) through which the conceived (*vorgestellte*) meaning shines through in complete brightness" (Ä I, p. 516).

In this way the metaphor surpasses the clarity and explicitness of the allegory whose meaning remains dependent and intertwined with its expression. At the same time, however, the metaphor is not quite as explicit as the simile, which expressly posits the distinction between its sense (*Sinn*) and its image and overtly compares them (Ä I, pp. 516–17). To be sure, the metaphor functions on the basis of such a distinction and it effects a similar kind of comparison, but its meaning can be fully revealed only by virtue of its context. Hegel defines the metaphor as

a completely concentrated comparison (*ins kurze gezogene Vergleichung*) that does not yet compare image and meaning to each other, but rather brings forward only the image, whose *literal or proper* meaning (***eigentlichen Sinn***) it deletes. However, through the context in which it occurs, the metaphor at the same time lets the actually intended meaning (*die wirklich gemeinte Bedeutung*) be recognized clearly in the image itself, even though it is not expressly declared. (Ä I, p. 517)

Thus, according to Hegel, even though the metaphor does not explicitly announce the fact that it is making a comparison, it functions *within its context* in such a way that both

its operation as a metaphor and its intended meaning are easily recognizable:

The metaphorical expression names only the one side, the image; however, in this context (*Zusammenhang*) in which the image is used, the true significance which is meant (*die eigentliche Bedeutung, welche gemeint ist*) lies so near that it, so to speak, is given at the same time without separation from the image. When we hear: . . . 'a sea of tears,' it becomes necessary for us not to take this expression literally (*eigentlich*), but as an image whose meaning in the context is at the same time expressly described to us (*dessen Bedeutung uns der Zusammenhang gleichfalls ausdrücklich bezeichnet*). (Ä I, p. 517)

The unusual form of the metaphor's expression thwarts the expectation of thought and forces a transference from literal to nonliteral meaning. For example, when one hears the expression "it's raining cats and dogs" for the first time, one's normal conception of rain and of cats and dogs is thwarted. One must reconsider the meaning of "raining" and "cats and dogs" and then imagine a new connection between the two.

Thus Derrida seems to be correct with regard to his first criticism of Hegel's theory of metaphor: Hegel does seem to claim that the context of a metaphor works to clarify its meaning completely. Here, however, Derrida fails to take adequate account of the fact that Hegel makes these claims about metaphor as it functions in a particular kind of poetic consciousness, namely a poetic consciousness that has already cognized the meaning he or she intends to convey. Hegel presents this theory of metaphor specifically within the context of artistic consciousness's struggle to find a form appropriate to an already clarified meaning. At least with regard to this point, he seems to be speaking only about metaphors that are devised by a poet who already has a clear meaning in mind and whose talent allows him or her to express this meaning with perfect "brightness." Hegel does not exclude the possibility that metaphor, much less the symbolic, may function at other levels of spirit's artistic, religious, or even philosophical development, or that these

manifestations of spirit may involve the kinds of ambiguity Derrida sees as intrinsic to metaphor. (Indeed, at this point in his lectures, Hegel actually opposes the clarity of the poet's metaphor to the ambiguity of the symbol [Ä I, p. 517]). Nor does Hegel claim that poets *always* begin with a preclarified meaning. On the contrary, he seems to be speaking here of relatively weak forms of poetic expression, for he suggests that poor poetry is bound to result if one begins with "a previously formulated prosaic thought" and then tries to turn it into an image, simply adding the latter "as a jewel or decoration" (VPK 1823, pp. 21–22). In this section on conscious symbolism, Hegel focuses on metaphor as a product of conscious poetic device, but he also indicates that poems created out of an intuited unity of the spiritual and the sensuous are superior to poems created with the conscious intention of manifesting spiritual meaning sensuously (see also Ä III, pp. 240, 244–45). Derrida is correct to suggest that Hegel underestimates the extent to which the effects of metaphors may elude the consciousness of poets and readers, but his neglect of the restricted context in which Hegel asserts this part of his theory of metaphor reduces the relevance of his criticism.

Indeed Hegel himself points out that, despite the degree of freedom the poet exercises when he or she chooses metaphors, metaphors have only a limited capacity to express meaning. In comparison to the transparent clarity of thought, the metaphor leaves a lot to be desired: "The metaphor, however, is always an interruption to the conceptual course (*des Vorstellungsganges*) and a constant distraction since it arouses and brings together images which do not immediately belong to the matter and the meaning" (Ä I, p. 523). According to Hegel, then, the metaphor does not succeed in the total obliteration of the power of the immediate, sensuous image because the qualities of its expression still manage to show themselves. Moreover, as Hegel insists against popular opinion, metaphors do not diminish the abstract character of the significance they convey. Rather, because they present particular qualities that do not coincide with their intended meaning, they

contribute to abstract conceptualization (Ä I, pp. 516–23). Thus Hegel's view seems to be that although the poet may manage to use metaphors to express a preconceptualized meaning completely, the meaning of metaphors in other contexts is not so clear; generally speaking, metaphors function symbolically, distorting and concealing their meaning even as they reveal it.

The same is true for the "image."<sup>29</sup> Even though it presents its meaning with greater clarity than the metaphor, the image or "*detailed*" (*ausführlich*) metaphor (Ä I, p. 523) still functions in and through the ambiguity of the symbolic. According to Hegel, the poet creates the image by positing the unity of two "independent appearances or conditions" in such a way that one of the two appearances or conditions gives the meaning and the other makes it "tangible and comprehensible" (*fassbar*) (Ä I, p. 524). However, as Hegel observes, the image still leaves room for ambiguity and abstraction because it fails to emphasize its significance over and above its concrete presence (Ä I, p. 524). Instead of directly presenting its intended significance, it lends itself to the invocation of unintended associations that neither its structure nor its context acknowledge. For the same reason, the image may also restrict the attention of its interpreters to certain aspects of the intended significance and thereby effect an unjustified abstraction.

Far from denying the ambiguity of the metaphor and image, Hegel even goes so far as to suggest that the symbolic forms of poetic comparison draw their life from the ambiguity that pertains to them. He makes this point especially clear when he discusses the simile, the final form of symbolic comparison. In his view the simile overcomes the ambiguity of the metaphor and the image because it expressly indicates the fact that it is making a comparison by employing the word "like" or "as." Yet this clarity reduces it to "a merely idle repetition" and "an often boring superfluity" (Ä I, p. 526). As the product of symbolic consciousness, the simile allows the imagination to integrate sensuous externals into a unified whole, facilitates contemplation, and enables the overcoming of personal suffering

(*Ä I*, pp. 527–39). But the fact that its meaning and its act of comparison are explicit severely diminishes its power and its interest for Hegel. (Metaphors are more effective because they require a certain context in order for their meaning to be explicit.) Altogether Hegel leaves little doubt that he views the form of metaphor, image, and simile as inessential to the meaning preclarified in poetic consciousness. Derrida's second point of criticism is therefore valid, but only with respect to this particular activity of poetic consciousness. When the poet uses metaphor to connect an already clarified meaning with some other, external reality, it serves, in Hegel's view, as merely an "external ornamentation" of a separately comprehensible significance (*Ä I*, pp. 516–18). It is not essential to the meaning it conveys. In this case the metaphor does not create new meaning, but presents an already comprehended meaning *in a new way*. It does not develop new content, but it creates a new form.

The remaining two criticisms of Derrida's hold more weight because they pertain to the section of Hegel's discussion of metaphor which extends beyond his specific concern with poetic consciousness. Hegel does assert, as Derrida observes, that metaphors generally work through an erasure of the sensuous image in favor of a spiritual meaning. Specifically, Hegel sees metaphors as functioning through an "exchange" of the sensuous for the spiritual. Again, as Hegel says, metaphors

a) arise from the fact that a word which originally signifies only something sensuous is carried over into the spiritual sphere. *Fassen*, *begreifen* [to grasp, apprehend] and many words, to speak generally, which relate to knowing, have in respect of their literal meaning a purely sensuous content, which then is lost and exchanged for a spiritual meaning. (*Ä I*, p. 518)

As we have already seen, Derrida interprets this substitution of the spiritual for the sensuous as symptomatic of the whole tradition of Western metaphysics. Indeed, to the extent that Hegel suggests that the connotations of the original sensuous

image are “lost” in the metaphorical transference, Derrida has grounds for complaint. Metaphors and images do not necessarily leave their “original,” sensuous connotations behind; their meanings more often arise in conjunction with their sensuous elements. Even on this point Derrida goes a bit too far, however, for Hegel actually admits that metaphors do not erase their sensuous element completely when he says that they interfere with thought’s process and interfuse irrelevant images. Metaphors are an interruption to the process of thought precisely because the ambiguity of the sensuous remains attached to them (*Ä I*, pp. 522–23). As Hegel notes, metaphors are “doubled” expressions; they are in themselves a “duality,” a medium through which spirit can “go forth to the other” (*Ä I*, pp. 520–21).

Still, it cannot be denied that Hegel sees metaphors as working through a gradual depletion of the sensuous. The extent to which Hegel should be faulted for such a concept remains to be considered, however. Clearly, a transcendence of the mere sensible image serves as the condition for the creation of new poetic expressions. If every sensible image could bear only one immediate sense—if the sensuous could *only* be sensuous and could not take any new implications—the art of poetry would not exist.

Derrida’s concerns gain more relevance when viewed with respect to Hegel’s philosophy as a whole. His claim, for example, that philosophy overestimates its ability to find the image’s original meaning and to control the effects of the metaphorical transference pertain to the broader issue of thought’s relation to metaphor and the symbolic, rather than merely to the narrow concern of how philosophy understands metaphor as a product of artistic consciousness. This broader question begins to surface in Hegel’s aesthetics when Hegel asserts that there is no problem in determining, at least in living languages, whether a word or set of words is to be taken literally or metaphorically. With respect to this point, Derrida’s criticism of Hegel is valid, and he is justified in drawing out implications that go beyond Hegel’s aesthetics because Hegel discusses metaphor here as pertaining to language in gen-

eral and not just to poetry. Shortly after explaining that metaphors enact a transference within language, Hegel notes that this transference may, after a time, become superfluous. After several uses, a metaphor's ability to transform meaning into a new form may become "worn-out." Such an overused metaphor no longer thwarts the expectation of thought nor "interrupts" the flow of conceptual discourse. It no longer requires an extra transference of meaning because this transference has become, so to speak, a habit of thought. After several repetitions of the same transference, thought no longer needs to stop to process it. Thought can think the spiritual or mental sense of a word that originally had only a sensuous meaning without consciously reflecting upon what it is doing. It can gather the sense of "*begreifen*" ("to comprehend"), for example, without acknowledging the word's original physical sense "to grab or grasp" (*Ä I*, p. 518). The metaphor, as such, is dead, but its abstract or spiritual meaning is communicated nonetheless. Accordingly, in Hegel's view, it is not difficult to distinguish between metaphorical and literal meaning, at least in living languages.

Derrida is correct to question Hegel here, for even in living languages, as Derrida points out so well, the difference between a metaphor that has effects and one that does not is far from clear-cut and certainly never final. Metaphors may convey meanings that do not coincide with the intended ones. Nevertheless, Derrida's claim that the philosopher *in principle* cannot abstract from the unintended effects of the metaphors he or she uses goes, again, a bit too far. Hegel argues that philosophical thought can detach itself from the effects of metaphor by becoming conscious of them and of its own power to determine meaning. Although this power may not be as absolute as Hegel suggests, it is substantial enough for the theoretical purposes of philosophy. Philosophy can and must abstract from the unintended connotations of meaning and focus on the meanings it consciously designates for itself. Even if other aspects of the human individual remain influenced by unintended metaphorical effects, philosophical *thought* can



disregard them and define its own terms. In chapter two, we will see how and why Hegel thinks such a determination of meaning is not only possible, but also necessary.

Of course, this belief in philosophy's ability to determine meaning represents to Derrida an overestimation of philosophy's power. In his view the root of the problem is that Hegel, like most of the philosophers in the tradition of Western metaphysics, insists upon viewing metaphor only in terms of its intended meaning. In other words, the transfer of meaning conceived under the term "metaphor" is supposed to take place within the field of consciousness: metaphor is defined as belonging to the domain of philosophy, even though the original image that underlies it always comes from some other sphere. What this means according to Derrida is that while philosophy presumes itself to have complete control over its metaphors, it necessarily remains blind to some of their effects. Philosophy may well construct a *concept* of metaphor, but it can never master the metaphorical transference of meaning because the *ground* of metaphor exceeds its sphere. Ultimately, then, Derrida objects not just to particular elements of Hegel's theory of metaphor, but also to the fact that he asserts such a theory at all. Derrida disapproves of Hegel's confinement of metaphor within philosophical aesthetics.

However, Hegel's "theory of metaphor" does not preclude the possibility that metaphor—or at least some form of the symbolic—functions even within absolute spirit. Indeed, as we shall see in the following chapters, Hegel's discussion of the conscious forms of the symbolic type of art is not his last word on the symbolic. If this were so, we would have reason to think, as Derrida and most other commentators do, that Hegel simply leaves the symbolic behind in favor of those forms of reality mediated by the sign's transparent clarity. Yet, as we shall see, the symbolic returns to mediate spirit at crucial, if unexpected, points in spirit's development and absolute manifestation. Even on Hegel's terms, the role of the symbolic in art and religion does not leave philosophy untouched.

## Chapter Two



### The Means to Theoretical Self-Determination

Hegel's *Philosophy of Spirit* (*Philosophie des Geistes*)<sup>1</sup> constitutes the third section of his philosophical system, the part in which spirit returns to itself after having lost itself in the immediacy of nature. Following Hegel's sciences of logic and nature, Hegel's philosophy of spirit articulates the process by which "spirit" or "mind" (*Geist*) brings itself into existence. In contrast to nature, which is simply "there," spirit *recognizes itself* as being there. Through this very act, it distinguishes itself from nature and establishes itself as self-determining and free. In Hegel's system, this act of recognition arises from the synthesis of the simple immediacy of *the soul* (or the anthropological) and the reflective act of *consciousness* (or the phenomenological). Then, at the level of theoretical spirit, the first section of Hegel's psychology, spirit reconciles its immediate sense of totality with a conscious awareness of self-division, and comprehends itself *as this act* of reconciliation. It grasps itself, in other words, as both that which recognizes and that which is recognized. It apprehends itself as both the subject and the object of a single act of self-recognition. Thus unifying its subjective and objective dimensions, it gives its subjective activity objective reality, and it grants objective reality its subjective determinations. It comes to see itself as subjectively meaningful and objectively real at once.

More specifically, theoretical spirit takes on the form of intelligence and determines the manner and fact of its

existence through two complementary processes: the externalization of its subjectivity (in other words, the expression of its various intellectual capacities) and the internalization of its objectivity (that is, its coming-to-know the contents of its experience). On the one hand, spirit gains gradual cognizance of itself through its acts of intuition, representation, and memory. By exercising these capacities, spirit quite literally acts *out* its subjective self-conception and transforms itself into something that externally, immediately, and objectively *is*. Spirit actualizes itself, posits its own existence, and becomes the activity its concept supposes it to be (*ENZ III*, §457). On the other hand and at the same time, theoretical spirit learns to comprehend *in its own terms* what appears to it as simply “given.” The intelligence internalizes apparently external and accidental content and transforms it into content that is subjectively mediated and meaningful. As Hegel explains, it grants “the apparently foreign object, instead of the form of something given, particular, and accidental, the form of something internalized, subjective, general, necessary, and reasonable” (*ENZ III*, §443, Zus.). By acting upon its content in this way, spirit changes it from something that is simply there into something that has been mediated by it. By so doing spirit incorporates the contents of its experience into the structure of its own conscious self-reflection. These two processes of externalization and internalization, however, turn out to be reciprocal sides of the single process of spirit’s self-recognition. When the intelligence intuits, represents, and remembers the objects ‘given’ to it, it internalizes the content of this experience and externalizes its own internal capacities in the same move. Its internalization of apparently external objects is at once the actualization of its own subjective, theoretical activity.

This identification of the subjective and the objective in spirit’s theoretical self-determination has led many commentators to assert that Hegel develops a notion of spirit that “consumes” its other. If, as Hegel claims, theoretical spirit develops in and through the joint processes of inter-

nalizing its sensuous other and externalizing it as its own, then it seems as though spirit unjustly disregards the reality of the sensuous as "other." Spirit seems to deny the way in which it is dependent upon the sensuous, overestimating its ability to express and determine itself. Of course, as we have already seen, one of the chief critics in this regard is Jacques Derrida. According to Derrida, spirit arrogates to itself the power of complete theoretical determination through its concept of the sign. Indeed, Derrida is correct to note that at the level of theoretical spirit and for the purposes of *thought*, Hegel shows a clear preference for the sign's pure intellectual existence over the symbol's embeddedness in the sensuous. Hegel's concept of the sign acts as a theoretical construct, allowing spirit to abstract from its sensuous history. Hegel, in other words, maintains that the intelligence can abstract from the associations of the symbolic imagination and focus exclusively on the intended meanings marked by its signs.

But such an abstraction does not amount to an unjustified devaluation of the sensuous or a naive denial of the intelligence's own reliance upon it as Derrida and other critics of Hegel have suggested. Indeed, as this chapter aims to show, although Hegel does subordinate the sensuous with respect to the intelligible, he neither gainsays the way in which the intelligence depends upon the sensuous, nor does he propound a concept of spirit that "consumes" its other. As parts one and two of this chapter will demonstrate, Hegel makes it quite clear that the intelligence's ability to create the sign—and so to conceive of its theoretical freedom—arises out of its intuition, recollection, and imagination, elements of its experience that are intrinsically linked to the sensuous. Here, as we shall see, spirit does not deny or delete the sensuous, but simply structures it according to its own sense of coherence. The case, of course, is otherwise with the sign, for the intelligence does define the sign as above and beyond the sensuous. Yet, the negation of the sensuous that belongs to Hegel's concept of the sign may be justified as a particular *moment* of spirit's intellectual determination. Even if symbolic

associations continue to affect spirit in the course of its development, theoretical spirit can abstract from these effects without deluding itself about the extent of its power. For all *theoretical* purposes, spirit can determine its contents by naming them. In this way the sign and its power to name are central to Hegel's philosophy of language and his understanding of thought. However, as we will see in section three (and as we began to see in the previous chapter), Hegel understands language to include important symbolic elements even as it uses the sign as its basic building block. Nor does he reduce thought to the simple function of the sign, for as we shall see in part four when we follow the intelligence's movement through mechanical memory, spirit actually reaches the peak of its theoretical determination, not through the sign, but through *the breakdown* of the signifying relation. Through its internalization of empty signifiers and the resulting experience of the loss of meaning, spirit obtains a conception of itself as distinct from its content and contacts itself in the purity of thought for the first time: for all *theoretical* purposes, it grasps the unity of its self-conscious act and its being. It recognizes its power to define and create its own meaning. But while this recognition represents the height of spirit's theoretical development, it does not constitute spirit's absolute manifestation. After theoretical spirit reconciles itself with its practical desire and realizes itself in the ethical community, it must still manifest itself absolutely in art, religion, and philosophy, forms which contain or depend upon significant *symbolic* elements. This is the primary sense in which the intelligence has recourse to the symbolic: absolute spirit transcends the theoretical level and manifests itself in the symbolic forms of art and religion.

Moreover, as we will see throughout this chapter, spirit's theoretical mediation has recourse to the symbol as well as the sign. As conceptual devices arising from the organization of the intelligence's own structure but also having a kind of external, accidental, and immediate existence, symbols and signs enable spirit to connect its reflective activity with its

experience of immediate being. In other words, they mediate the processes by which spirit internalizes its apparent objects and externalizes itself. On the one hand, symbols and signs serve as the means through which the intelligence recognizes that its apparently external objects are part of its own subjective process. They allow the intelligence to incorporate its particular experiences into the general structure of its reflective act of self-identification. On the other hand, symbols and signs serve as the means through which the intelligence expresses its subjective self-conception in concrete objective reality. They allow the intelligence to establish itself as actually existing—to mediate itself and then to present itself as something immediate, to be a mediating activity that is also immediately ‘there.’ In short, they enable spirit to identify its act of knowing with real existence.

### **I. The Rise of the Symbol and Sign-making Capacities (Or, Does Spirit Consume the Sensuous?)**

Theoretical spirit accomplishes its formal recognition through the intelligence’s realization that what it at first seems to find is actually the product of its own activity. Although the material of sensuous intuition seems to exist independently of the intelligence’s formation of it, Hegel suggests that it has no real content until the intelligence structures it in accordance with its own sense of identity. To Hegel’s critics, this conception of the sensuous as derivative of the intelligible appears as a denial of the reality of the sensuous. But for Hegel, precisely what the intelligence does when it forms the sensuous according to its own principle is *to recognize it as real*. Indeed for Hegel, the only way the intelligence could deny or delete the sensuous would be *to let it go* without any intellectual formation, for this would be to let it disappear in its sheer immediacy. Without the intelligence’s intervention sensuous immediacy is nothing but the vanishing of being (*WL I*, pp. 82–83). Strictly speaking,

the intelligence *cannot* delete the sensuous as such, for the minute it acts upon the sensuous it bestows the sensuous with a reality that transcends mere immediacy.

Hegel does not, however, mean to say that the intelligence can determine the contents of its intuitions at will. Nor does he deny that different sensuous materials have different effects upon the intuiting subject. His point is just that as soon as the intelligence acknowledges a particular "effect," it has already begun to determine the content of the intuitive "cause." As he emphasizes, the subject participates actively in the determination of the content of intuitions. "It is inverted," Hegel declares, "to assume that first there are objects whose content forms our representations and then only afterwards our subjective activity arrives" (*ENZ I*, §163, Zus.). For Hegel, the intrinsic determinacy of objects is not something "other" than the intelligence's determinacy of them: "That which the intelligence appears to take up from outside is in truth nothing other than the *reasonable*, [and] therefore *identical* with and *immanent* in spirit" (*ENZ III*, §447, Zus.).<sup>2</sup> Hegel does not dispute that sensuous objects have a certain determinacy in themselves. He simply maintains that these determinations *necessarily concur* with the intelligence's determinacy of them, for it is *the essence* even of sensuous content to be rational (*ENZ III*, §448, Zus.). Thus, whether or not an object is green or blue, large or small, is not simply a matter of its inherent qualities, but also of the intelligence's conception of these qualities. Theoretical spirit cannot determine something green to be blue, but it can and does establish the categories that distinguish "blue" from "green"; it cannot change the size of a given object, but it can and does establish the criteria for what counts as "large" and "small" in various situations. Theoretical spirit, in other words, can compare various sensuous experiences and give them correspondingly appropriate and individually distinct names. Far from destroying or deleting the sensuous content it determines, the intelligence *transforms* the apparent contingency of the sensuous into a more lasting, intelligible form.

Yet the intelligence does not realize the extent of its determining power at first. Since recognition can take place only through a process of development that presupposes a state of nonrecognition, spirit necessarily begins its self-determination without recognizing what it is doing. In its very first stage, theoretical spirit sees itself in its most primitive, abstract, and immediate form. *As spirit*, it is the unity of the soul's sense of totality and of consciousness's knowing capacity; but *as immediate*, it does not yet recognize itself as this unity (*ENZ III*, §440). However, since spirit is essentially only what it recognizes itself to be (*ENZ III*, §468), and since nothing in spirit is merely immediate (*ENZ III*, §441, *Zus.*), theoretical spirit's condition as immediate signifies its intrinsic contradiction and necessary further development. In distinction from consciousness, which could only view its object as a mere negative, spirit recognizes this negativity to be within itself and has the drive (*Trieb*) to overcome it. This recognition takes various forms which gradually increase with respect to the degree of active reflection they require on the part of the intelligence. Here in part one, we will follow the early stages of the intelligence's progress toward the formal recognition of its own creative capacity.

#### A. *Intuition* (*Anschauung*)

According to Hegel, "Spirit in so far as it is theoretical is two-sided: it relates itself . . . to itself and relates itself to things." (*VPR I-s*, p. 335). Hegel names the first step of this double relation "intuition" (*Anschauung*) and its first phase "feeling" or "sensation" (*Empfindung*). At this early stage of its theoretical experience, the intelligence identifies itself very closely with the contents of its experience. Its content appears to it as already determined and it relates to itself as "to a given content" (*zu einem gegebenen Inhalt*)—that is, as to a determination (*Bestimmtheit*) that it has simply found (*ENZ III*, §447). Not yet capable of recognizing its power of determination, theoretical spirit assumes itself to be in the form of accidental particularity. It does not yet



recognize itself as rational, nor does it realize the extent to which all of its contents are determined by this rationality (*ENZ III*, §447). Although it seems, even to spirit, that it simply finds itself and its other contents, it is actually in the process of determining them both.

Spirit's first move toward a greater recognition of its power of determination occurs through an act of attentiveness (*Aufmerksamkeit*) to its sensations and feelings (*Empfindungen*). This act breaks up the immediacy of its intuition into two separate elements: that of being (*des Seienden*) and that of having or owning (*des Seinigen*) (*ENZ III*, §448). By attending to its feeling, the intelligence creates a distinction between itself and its *Empfindungen* and begins to cognize this distinction as part of its own activity. The intelligence turns, so to speak, inward and outward simultaneously; its immediacy gains depth—or becomes mediated. This activity of cognition surpasses the activity of sense consciousness in that it grasps its content as a unified totality. However, the intelligence experiences the determinations of its content as being outside of itself, not yet recognizing them as identical with the determinations of its own act. As Hegel explains, in its act of intuition, the intelligence “throws out” or “projects” (*wirft hinaus*) its feelings into time and space (*ENZ III*, §448). This projection may take place in one of two ways. When the feeling comes from an inner emotion, intelligence releases itself from it by determining it as an outer intuition, that is, by expressing it in painting, poetry, or the like. When the sensation stems from a sense organ, the intelligence transfers the source of the sensation to an outside object. Through these acts of externalization, the intelligence gains a degree of freedom. It determines itself beyond the immediacy of its emotions and sensations.

Obviously, Hegel follows Kant to a certain degree in his discussion of the intelligence's determinations of space and time (*ENZ III*, §448, *Zus*). As was the case for Kant, the intuitive act of determining space and time is not for Hegel a “mere” subjective determination distinct from “real” space and time: the intelligence's space and time is actual space

and time. In other words, the intelligence's projection of intuitions into space and time is the coming into existence of real space and time *for it*. Unlike Kant, however, Hegel insists that space and time are not given antecedently by an 'imposing' act of the intelligence: "the things . . . are in truth themselves spatial and temporal" (*ENZ III*, §448, Zus). Far from being a mere act of knowing or an artificial imposition of a mind that does not belong to reality, theoretical spirit's intuitive determining of space and time is part of the *actual being* of space and time (*ENZ III*, §448). The intelligence's activity is part of the whole structure of reality and truth. To be sure, for Hegel, space and time exist even without spirit's consciousness of them, but spirit's consciousness of space and time determines *how* space and time appear.

The intelligence's act of projecting its intuitions into space and time thus differs significantly from the subjective act of knowing propounded by Kant. As Murray Greene points out, Hegel's placement of intuition on the side of intelligence rather than on the side of sensation already indicates a distinction from Kant that is worthy of note.<sup>3</sup> But the difference is greater still. In direct contrast to what is often taken to be Kant's portrayal of the intelligence as an empty form that receives its content from external sensations, Hegel views the activity of intelligence as intrinsic to the specificity of its content (*Phil G*, p. 191). He maintains, for example, that "the whole of reason—of the entire material of spirit" is present in the earliest stage of intuition (*Empfindung*) (*ENZ III*, §447). The fact that sensuous elements appear as external to the intelligence is only the result of the primitive form of the intelligence's intuitive act (*ENZ III*, §447). The intelligence has not yet developed sufficiently to realize that it actually *defines* the determinations it seems to receive in an unmediated way.

Gradually, however, spirit moves toward this realization. Since theoretical spirit is only cognizant of the intuitions to which it pays attention, it comes to see its act of attention as essential to its apparently given intuited feelings. Accordingly, it begins to intuit its other as "the other of itself" (*das Andere seiner selbst*), that is, as *its own* other

(*ENZ III*, §448). After having differentiated itself from the other contents of its experience, it discovers how its own act allows it to identify with this “other.” It discovers, in other words, how its own determinations apply to the sensuous and give it form. By identifying with the sensuous in this way, the intelligence does not “consume” it, but lifts the sensuous out of the domain of mere transience. In so doing, it does not deny the difference between itself and the sensuous, but actually confirms this difference through its act upon it. Although it may seem that the intelligence does a kind of “violence” to the pure sensation, the intelligence actually does not do anything to change the “content” of sensation (*ENZ III*, §448, *Zus.*). It does impose its form upon the sensuous, but in so doing, it recognizes the sensuous as such. Only by examining the content on its own terms can the intelligence experience it as being real, take it as true (*wahrnehmen*). Indeed, for Hegel, it is only after the intelligence senses the unity of the two moments of attention that it becomes “real intuition” (*eigentliche Anschauung*) (*ENZ III*, §448, *Zus*; *ENZ III*, §449).

### *B. Representation (Vorstellung)*

When the intelligence reflects upon its act of intuition, it gains a whole new perspective on it. It becomes cognizant of the fact that intuition entails some kind of distinction between that which intuits and that which is intuited, that is, between immediate being and its attentiveness to that being. By turning its attention to this distinction and reflecting upon it, the intelligence “recollects itself” into a unity that contains differentiation within it. In other words, the intelligence connects the two moments of attention, being and having, and sees that the intuitions it *has* comprise the activity it *is*. When this happens, spirit explicitly posits itself as the agent of the intuition and the whole form of its act changes. It begins to understand itself as distinct from, but intrinsically connected to, what at first appeared to be wholly other than it. Once the intelligence attains this understanding, its activity becomes one of representation

(*Vorstellung*). Besides being able to choose which contents of its given experience it will pay attention to, the intelligence can now begin to present itself with its own contents.

For Hegel, the act of representation, like intuition, pertains as much to theoretical spirit's progress toward formal self-recognition as it does to its determination of the contents that remain in some sense distinct from its act. Here again, the process of intelligence's externalization and concretion coincides with the internalization and generalization of its particular, accidental experiences. By determining its content, the intelligence also activates its own determining capacity. With "interior recollection" (*Erinnerung*), the first phase of representation, the intelligence internalizes its intuitions by positing them as its own (*ENZ III*, §451).<sup>4</sup> This is not, however, a mere appropriation of the external other, for the intelligence must also externalize itself in the process. As Hegel specifies, theoretical spirit moves beyond the level of intuition through a double action: it simultaneously externalizes itself and internalizes its intuition. On the one hand, it "penetrates" (*durchdringt*) the intuition and becomes present (*gegenwärtig*) in it; on the other hand, it "makes the intuition into something internal" (*macht sie zu etwas Innerlichem*) (*ENZ III*, §450). Whichever way the transition is conceived, it amounts to the same thing: the intelligence recognizes its own activity to be the essence of the intuition's determination; it sees that the power of intuition lies within itself (*ENZ III*, §445). "Waking up to itself" and "recollecting" the intuitions that it previously projected outside itself, the intelligence now accepts them as its own. This transcending of the need for the act of intuition does not mean that the intelligence obliterates or disregards the content of its intuitions. It just means that the intelligence changes its relation to this content. Once the intelligence represents the intuition, it no longer needs to *find* the intuition in order to have a picture of its content (*ENZ III*, §450). Once the intelligence realizes that its activity is the essence of its intuition, that is, once it realizes that it can preserve the content of the intuition through its own activity, its capacity "simply to find" the content is superseded. The intuition's

being as merely “found”—its accidental relation to the intelligence’s act—no longer characterizes the intelligence’s experience of it. Instead, the intelligence *recalls* its content as belonging to its own activity. The intelligence acknowledges the contents of its intuitions to be of its own determination, considers them in its own space and time, and preserves them in its own “image” (*Bild*). In the process, the intelligence alters itself as much as it changes the form of its content. By constructing the image, the intelligence grants its content a new form, freeing it from its simple immediacy and transience, and it simultaneously recognizes itself as having the determinations and dimensionality that first appeared to be outside of it (*ENZ III*, §§452–53).

This freedom from immediacy has its price, however. Not only does it come “at the cost of the clarity and freshness” that belonged to the immediate intuition (*ENZ III*, §452, *Zus.*), but it actually indicates the image’s *loss* of immediacy. As the intelligence becomes absorbed in its reflective internalizing activity, it fails to sustain the act of attention that had previously given its content their “when and where” (*ENZ III*, §453). Withdrawing into “the in-itself of its determinations” and turning its attention away from the determinate content of its images, the intelligence harbors them within itself “unconsciously” (*bewusstlos*). As a consequence of this lack of attention, the images lose their particularity to the relatively abstract generality of the intelligence’s act. The intelligence brings the various spaces and times of the immediate intuitions together, “subsuming” them indiscriminately into a vague, indeterminate form, which Hegel calls “the nocturnal pit” (*ENZ III*, §452, *Zus.*; §§453–54).

Here on the dark side of the intelligence, the images are preserved in their “virtual possibility.” “No longer existing,” they are “unconsciously,” yet “affirmatively” preserved within the intelligence (*ENZ III*, §453). Consequently, the images may regain their determinations if and when the intelligence returns its attention to the corresponding determinate intuitions. However, since intuitions by definition have the form of “simply being found,” this

first and “most abstract” form of re-presentation is not wholly within the intelligence’s power. The intelligence may pay attention to this or that intuition, but it cannot determine any specific intuition to be there. It cannot create intuitions in their *immediate* reality because its determination of them is specifically an act of *mediation*. In this sense the intelligence’s act is still dependent upon what happens to come to its attention.

Nonetheless, after repeated intuitions of the same content, the intelligence can recognize an identity between its intuitions and the images it holds within itself and see that they have the same determinate content (*ENZ III, §454*). Thus, in order to discern the identity between its image and the determinate existence of its prior intuitions, the intelligence must only “recollect itself” (*erinnern sich*) as having had these intuitions. In other words, the intelligence assures itself of the image’s determinate existence by recalling having intuited the same determination previously. On the basis of this identity, it now can unite the two forms into one determinate representation. With this synthesis of the internalized existence (*des erinnerten Daseins*) and the inner image (*des inneren Bildes*), it moves beyond recollection’s abstract form of representation to “true representation” (*die eigentliche Vorstellung*). At this point, the intelligence “no longer needs” the external intuition in order to re-present the determinate existence of its image’s content. Nor does it need to view its content in the form of intuition because it has recognized this content to be identical to the images it itself contains (*ENZ III, §454*).

Though Hegel does not call our attention to the fact, a loss of intuited content is obviously at risk here. As David Krell points out, it is necessary to consider whether the intelligence’s recollection or internalizing remembrance (*Erinnerung*) “may require that some aspects of intuition be forgotten and fall into oblivion.”<sup>5</sup> Similarly, John Sallis doubts that the imagination can recover all of the images the intelligence unconsciously stored in the pit: “The question is whether the nocturnal pit can be so thoroughly illuminated by the light of presence or whether even after the

advent of reproductive imagination there do not remain withdrawn in its dark depths slumbering images that are not simply at the call of spirit.”<sup>6</sup> Hegel, however, does not explicitly assert that all of the images once stored in the pit are consciously recovered. Indeed, his analysis of attention makes it clear that theoretical spirit’s activity is a *selective* one. Just as the intelligence attends to and internalizes only some of its *Empfindungen* (*ENZ III*, §448), it also recalls only some of the images of the pit. As Hegel notes, only the images reinforced by repetition may be recalled by the intelligence (*ENZ III*, §454), and only those images “considered worthy” of retention by the intelligence may avoid falling into a kind of absolute past (*ENZ III*, §452, Zus.). The intelligence has only limited control with regard to its ability to call up such images (*ENZ III*, §453, Zus.), and even the ones the intelligence does recall are likely to lack the clarity and vividness of their original perception (*ENZ III*, §452, Zus.). Thus, as Hegel freely admits, the imagination alone cannot ensure spirit’s full self-access. Hegel himself remarks, “No one knows what an infinite mass of images of the past slumbers within him” (*ENZ III*, §453, Zus.). As long as spirit is merely subjective, it is bound to have its particularities and accidentalities. Hegel does not give any explanation as to the possible effects of images that are not recovered, but we might well imagine that those images repressed by theoretical spirit return on the practical side of spirit in the form of desire.

Having determined its inner images through repeated intuitions and acts of generalization, the intelligence becomes able to call them forth in an active manner. With this capacity, representation takes the form of imagination (*Einbildungskraft*). The imagination first externalizes its interior images in a manner parallel to the intuition’s projection of its content into space and time; in both cases the intelligence transfers its own determinations onto its content. However, the act of externalization that takes place here on the level of imagination contains a higher degree of reflection and so grants a greater degree of determinacy. Through the intelligence’s act of imagination, the “paltry

and superficial" determinacies of space and time gain the complexity and depth of the intelligence's reflective act of self-awareness. What this means is that the intelligence can now grasp each image of which it has become conscious as a unity that may be differentiated from the others, and it can present each to itself as a determinate part of the whole "supply" (*Vorrat*) of images it stores. In other words, by asserting the identity between its inwardly determined images and the structure of its own self-awareness, reproductive imagination acquires the capacity to comprehend its images in their "individuality" (*Individualität*) (*ENZ III*, §455). With this ability the imagination moves beyond its merely reproductive capacity and begins to make symbols and signs.

## **II. From Symbol to Sign: A Different Kind of Difference (Or, is the Sign a Transparent Means of Spirit?)**

As we saw in the previous chapter, Hegel defines the sign and the symbol as immediate intuitions or images which indicate a meaning that they do not expressly contain. They differ from each other in that the symbol presents the qualities of its meaning which it is meant to indicate, while the sign *per se* has nothing in common with the meaning arbitrarily attributed to it. The symbol, in other words, necessarily involves a degree of ambiguity because it does not indicate which qualities of its immediate presence pertain to its meaning and which do not. By contrast, due to its utter indifference to its sensuous presence, the sign supersedes the confusions involved in symbolic expressions. *By definition*, it designates a *clarified* meaning. For this reason, Hegel understands the sign to be more suitable to theoretical spirit's highest determination than the symbol and so conceives of the intelligence's development in terms of a movement from symbol-making to sign-making imagination. While the symbol remains tied to some sensuous elements that do not pertain to its meaning, the sign is



disengaged from all sensuous elements and thus manages to communicate precisely what the intelligence intends. Even though a certain sensuous existence underlies the sign, the particularity of this sensuousness does not factor into the sign's meaning. Hegel's conception of the sign thus attributes to the intelligence the capacity to abstract from its sensuous experience and assign meaning to immediate intuitions on an arbitrary basis.

But as we saw in the introduction to this work, Derrida criticizes Hegel for just this reason. According to Derrida, one can never discount the associations that belong to the intuition that underlies the "signified" meaning; one cannot assume "the signifier" to convey an intended meaning without bringing along with it the "traces" of other affiliations. In other words, by Derrida's assessment, the transition from the symbolic to the sign-making imagination can never be complete. There can be no real sign in Hegel's sense of the term because the material element of the sign can never be made indifferent to the history that links it to specific sensuous manifestations. Even in spoken language, where the material element of language is reduced to a minimum, there can be no guarantee that all confusion will be superseded and that the sign will function as the "transparent" medium of a thoroughly clarified meaning. For Derrida this is a key point in the Hegelian text, for it is precisely through its concept of the sign that the intelligence attributes to itself its extensive determining power. Indeed, it is through the sign that the intelligence begins to rise above its mere subjectivity and recognize itself as having objective existence. For Hegel, however, the intelligence's ability to abstract from the sensuous domain is no crime against the latter; it is simply part of what defines the intelligence as such. In the next section, as we follow the movement from the symbol to the sign, we will see why Hegel maintains that the intelligence can abstract from the associations of the symbolic imagination and focus exclusively on the intended meanings marked by its signs. We will discover, in other words, the sense in which Hegel conceives the sign to be "transparent."

### A. *The Imagination's Creation of Symbols and Signs*

When the intelligence reflects upon itself again, it becomes able to distinguish between its own general capacity to reproduce images and the particularity of its images. As a result, it develops the ability to connect its images according to its own rule, that is, according to the principle of identity. Having grasped itself as a kind of unity of differences or container of diverse experiences, the intelligence generates the “power” (*Kraft*) to bring similar images together (*ENZ III*, §455). No longer simply recollecting its images in the haphazard manner of internal recollection or reproducing them solely on the basis of the degree of intuitive reinforcement, the intelligence can now “associate” its images according to qualities they share, “subsuming” them under more general categories (*ENZ III*, §§455–56). Interestingly, Hegel notes here that practical desires and interests play a role in this organization (*ENZ III*, §§455–56).

This act of association leads to the production of symbols (*ENZ III*, §456).<sup>7</sup> The “symbolizing, allegorizing, or poeticizing imagination” (*symbolisierende, allegorisierende oder dichtende Einbildungskraft*) begins with images originally given to it in sensation and attributes a general meaning to them (*ENZ III*, §456). Symbols, therefore, like the other products of associative imagination, are “syntheses” (*Synthesen*) “deriv[ing] from the foundedness of intuitions” (*von dem Gefundenen der Anschauung herkommt*) (*ENZ III*, §456). Moreover, since the intelligence can use only those images whose content has some quality which corresponds to the meaning it intends to express when it creates the symbol, Hegel says that the act of symbolizing is a “still conditioned” and therefore “only relatively free activity” (*noch bedingte, nur relativ freie Tätigkeit*) (*ENZ III*, §457, Zus.). At this point, the imagination has surpassed its previous, merely reproductive activity; it no longer needs to turn to its images for a confirmation of its act of determining because it now possesses this confirmation “immediately” in its symbols. But while the intelligence certainly exercises a “power” (*Macht*) over its images (*Phil G*, p. 205), it remains to some

extent determined by the sensuous, accidental contents of its experience. Therefore, since the intelligence is nothing but its own act, its existence at this point is still “imaginative” or “figurative” (*bildlich*) (*ENZ III*, §457). It has a subjective conception of itself but it has not yet objectified it; it has not yet recognized the intrinsic identity between its subjective self-conception and its objective reality (*ENZ III*, §457). In order for this recognition to take place, the intelligence must do more than associate its internal content: *it must produce external intuitions*. This “self-expressing, intuition-producing” activity occurs only at the highest level of imagination, “sign-making imagination” (*Zeichen machende Phantasie*) (*ENZ III*, §457). Thus Hegel seems to imply that while the symbol’s association may be represented solely within the imagination, the sign’s meaning must be marked by an external form. The symbol’s meaning remains tied to the sensuous dimension within the space of representation; the sign breaks this connection with the sensuous by taking on an external form that has nothing to do with its meaning or with the intelligence’s previous associations.

According to Hegel, the transition from the symbol to the sign is induced by the intelligence’s drive to transcend the mere subjectivity of its internal determinations.<sup>8</sup> In its progress from symbolizing to sign-making, the intelligence turns its attention to the immediacy of the identity that the symbol establishes between its general inner act of determination and the content of its particular, intuitively derived images. In other words, it begins to view its symbolizing activity—an identification of two *different* elements—exclusively in view of the identity to which it attests. As Hegel explains, “Since the content of the general representation which is to be proved (*bewährt*) merges only with itself (*sich nur mit sich selber zusammenschliesst*) in the content of the symbol serving image, the mediated being (*Vermitteltseins*) of this proving . . . changes (*schlägt um*) into the form of immediacy” (*ENZ III*, §457, *Zus.*). The intelligence focuses on the identity of meaning and expression to such an extent that the difference between them falls out of

view. In this process the intelligence does not delete or erase this difference between the immediate expression and the meaning created through mediation: it simply removes its attention away from this difference, declaring itself *indifferent* to it. The sign, then, becomes the mark of this abstraction, the token of this indifference. And it is precisely on the basis of this indifference that the sign is to be distinguished from the symbol:

The *sign* is different from the *symbol*, an intuition whose *own* determinateness (*Bestimmtheit*) according to its essence and concept is more or less the content which it expresses as symbol; with the sign as such, however, the particular content of the intuition and that of the sign have nothing to do with each other (*geht . . . einander nichts an*). (*ENZ III*, §458)

Accordingly, whereas in the act of symbolizing, the intelligence had to take “the given content of its images” into account in setting forth its general representation, in the act of sign-making the intelligence need not do so (*ENZ III*, §457, *Zus.*). In the exercise of its sign-making capacity the intelligence can (at least theoretically) choose *any* external intuition to represent its intended meaning. No longer under the illusion of a separation between general representation (the internal) and particular image (the apparent external), the intelligence identifies the determinations of its internalizing act with the determinations of its concrete intuitions, regardless of their specific content (*ENZ III*, §457, *Zus.*). “When the intelligence has designated something, it has finished with the content of the intuition (*mit . . . fertig geworden*) and given the sensuous material a meaning foreign to it” (*ENZ III*, §457, *Zus.*). By asserting its *indifference* to the difference between meaning and expression—that is, by employing signs, the intelligence becomes able to direct its attention to the differences in meaning which it designates for itself. It frees itself from the ambiguities involved in its symbolic identifications and confronts only the differences that *it knows itself* to have made. Thus,

given Hegel's understanding of the terms, the intelligence's transition from symbolizing to sign-making consists in the move from the difference *between meaning and expression* that conditions the identity expressed by the symbol to differences *within meaning*.

Accordingly, as Derrida has observed, spirit's creation of the sign consists in its dismissal of the implications of the sensuous content which underlies the sign. Spirit literally *thinks itself away* from the sensuous. It abstracts from its prior experience. But this does not mean that symbolic associations do not in some way remain or even that they do not in some way continue to affect the subject; it merely means that *the intelligence* can disregard them. As theoretical, spirit is not bound to the associations of its prior experience, but can freely choose to endow the contents of its experience with some other, new, and unrelated meaning. Of course, this is an important point of contention for Derrida, who insists that the effect of meaning can never fully accord with the intention given to it because the sensuous elements of the sign necessarily work against the intelligence's intention. But Derrida is wrong to assert this necessity. Surely, as Hegel also admits, sensuous elements may sometimes interfere with the intelligence's production and use of signs, but the intelligence is nonetheless *capable* of this production and use. For all *theoretical* purposes, it is capable of sustaining the abstraction involved. Hegel does not present an argument for this point, but his claim is relatively modest since this ability to abstract and use signs is presupposed by a host of human activities. In order to play chess, for example, one must abstract from one's experience and let each piece have its designated function. Even though one might still have associations which confuse or contradict these designations (such as that the king should be the piece with the greatest power of mobility or that the pawns should have a higher worth), one *can* nonetheless disregard these associations and follow the rules of the game. Similar kinds of abstractions are necessary in order to do to math; one may, for example, have to "let x" equal something that has no real connection to "x" per se. Obvi-

ously, the more associations a subject has with a given sensory existence, the more difficult the abstraction becomes, but it remains within the power of the intelligence to designate sensuous material with whatever meaning it chooses. Even if *the subject* (which is both theoretical and practical) cannot completely disregard the particularity of the content in any ultimate sense, *the intelligence* can abstract from this particularity for the purpose of some theoretical exercise.

For Hegel, the most important use of the sign occurs in its creation of the word, and Derrida directs his criticisms primarily against the way in which Hegel sees the signs as functioning in language. Yet, as we have begun to see in the last chapter and as we shall continue to see, Hegel does not reduce language to this “transparent” functioning of the sign, even though he does insist that the intelligence has the power to abstract from previous associations and restrict its words to a sphere that fixes its meaning. In an important way, then, Hegel’s view coincides with Derrida’s, for Hegel also sees the symbolic as essential to spirit’s linguistic mediation.

### *B. The Importance of the Sign and the Symbol*

Taken together as products of the imagination, the symbol and sign serve an indispensable function in the process of theoretical spirit’s coming to self-recognition. By connecting the intelligence’s interior subjectivity with the content of its objective experience, symbols and signs bring the intelligence near to its ultimate goal of self-recognition, that is, of recognizing its subjective power to exist in objective reality. More specifically, they enable the intelligence to posit the identity of its general representations with its particular images and intuitions. In the case of the symbol, the associative imagination begins with an assumption of difference between meaning and expression and produces the symbol as a means of identifying the two. As a result, the intelligence experiences a connection between its own internal generality and the representations with which it presents itself. It starts to imagine an identity between itself

and its content, but it assumes this identity to be merely subjective. Aware that it is itself performing the act of synthesis, it does not yet realize that its internal and external experiences may also be objectively connected. The associative imagination's act of symbolic identification nonetheless prepares the way for the stronger identification produced by the creative imagination. By focusing on the identity produced by the symbol, the imagination begins to be able to fathom this identity as complete. Through a radicalization of its symbolic act, it becomes able to produce signs.

Through the sign the intelligence fully identifies its general representations and its particular images. By establishing an identity which is indifferent to the difference between meaning and expression, the sign allows the intelligence to determine its content completely and thus to create new meaning, that is, meaning independent of the intuitions' past associations. Here, at the level of sign-making imagination, the intelligence manages to externalize its representations. Instead of simply identifying an image with a more general meaning as it does with the symbol, the intelligence now identifies an *external* intuition with its own determinate meaning. According to Derrida this activity is merely passive, "a simple exteriorization . . . an expression; the placing outside of an interior content,"<sup>9</sup> but for Hegel this activity is a highly creative one. For the intelligence does not simply place an inner determination outside of itself: it literally *makes* a connection between its interior determinations and exterior intuitions. By designating intuitions with meaning in an arbitrary manner, the intelligence *creates* meaning. It gives the intuitions a kind of existence they would not otherwise have.

Derrida also objects to the idea that the intelligence can "produce" intuitions. If intuitions are to be understood as material elements given to the intelligence, then it seems contradictory to assert that the intelligence can produce them, for that would, as Derrida suggests, make the difference between activity and passivity obsolete. But for Hegel, intuitions are not by definition material. They are

intelligible determinations *in the form of mere givenness*; they appear as given (and so are in a certain sense given), but they are subject to the intelligence's determination at the same time. Regardless of the specificity of their content, the intelligence may use them for its own purposes. For example, it may bring tones together in unnatural ways, and it may use various materials to form specific intuitable determinations such as letters of an alphabet. In both cases it structures its material into new shapes and so "produces" new intuitions. Obviously, it remains dependent upon an underlying material element, but this material is accidental or inessential to the spoken and written words because they could just as well be produced by another voice or another material element.

To be sure, as Derrida notes, the intelligence's production of intuitions—its determination of meaning—does involve a kind of death: the intuitions are no longer what they once were. Spirit "kills" the immediacy of the intuitions so that they may gain a more lasting meaning. But to destroy mere immediacy is to preserve it. Since immediacy as such necessarily vanishes, only a transformation of it into something mediated can save it, can let it "be" more than a fading into nonbeing (*ENZ III*, §450, Zus.; see also *WL I*, pp. 82–83). Derrida goes to great pains to point out the association between the sign and death, but this connection is freely admitted by Hegel. The sign, Hegel says, is "the pyramid (*die Pyramide*), in which a foreign soul is placed (*versetzt*) and preserved (*aufbewahrt*)" (*ENZ III*, §458). Although the meaning attributed to the sign has nothing to do with the original intuition, the intelligence grants that intuition a further existence by imbuing it with its own power. As Hegel explains, "the intelligence makes the transitory (*das Vergängliche*) intransitory (*unvergänglich*), makes a mummy out of it and preserves it" (*Phil G*, pp. 198–99). The sign, then, is not to be understood simply as the material element of the intelligence's meaning; it is *the whole relation* (signified as well as signifier) by which the fleeting immediacy of intuition may gain a more permanent existence.



The sign serves some other important functions for theoretical spirit as well. In the last stages of representation, spirit's theoretical recognition of itself as self-determining culminates in its creation and memorization of names. As Hegel claims, "The name is the simple sign for the real, that is, simple . . . representation" (*der Name ist das einfache Zeichen für die eigentliche, d.i. einfache . . . Vorstellung*) (*ENZ III*, §459). As a kind of sign, the name offers no quality or concrete determination that could interfere with the intelligence's own act of designating and determining being (*ENZ III*, §459). The name functions simply to mark the intelligence's meaning. Suggesting that this fact is too often forgotten, Hegel emphasizes that names themselves are "meaningless" (*sinnlos*); they gain meaning, he says, only by being employed as signs, that is, only by having a meaning attributed to them (*ENZ III*, §459). Words do not indicate anything on their own; their meaning is a result of how they are designated. This holds for spoken as well as written words. As vocal sounds (*Töne*), the immediate external aspect of words passes in time, while the internal, designated meanings they convey endure, at least in the sense that they may be reinternalized (*ENZ III*, §459). As the written marks of alphabetic writing, words signify these tones and are thus "signs of signs" (*Zeichen der Zeichen*) (*ENZ III*, §459). Therefore, in contrast to hieroglyphic writing, which pictures meaning without fully clarifying it, words in alphabetic languages allow for much greater clarity because they comprise expressions that are designated by explicit meaning. Instead of being distracted by the many possible meanings of various symbols, the intelligence can focus upon the meanings it assigns to corresponding expressions.

In this way, as Hegel explains, the word reduces (*reduziert*) the intelligence's act of sign-making to its most basic elements. The resulting simplicity enables the intelligence to reflect upon its act of sign-making and thus to reach a higher level of consciousness and determination (*ENZ III*, §459). This reflection has, in turn, a double effect. In the first place, through this reflection upon its designating activity, the intelligence recognizes that its act of design-

nation is the source of actual meaning. At the same time, this act of reflection is essentially a self-reflection and therefore indicative of something about intelligence as much as about its production: the intelligence discovers the sense in which it *is* its own meaning and content. In other words, by connecting an external intuition with its own determinate meaning, the sign allows the intelligence not only to determine the meaning of its contents, but also to place itself in the realm of immediate existence, to mark itself as actually existing. By facilitating the intelligence's recognition of its own act, the sign enables the intelligence to bring itself into being; and since this recognition is its being, the sign literally enables the intelligence "to make itself be" (*ENZ III*, §457).

Nonetheless, even though the sign accomplishes the unity of being and generality after which the intelligence strives, from the viewpoint of absolute spirit, this accomplishment succeeds *only partially*. It produces only "formal" theoretical products: "the word," an "ideal world," and "abstract self-determination" (*ENZ III*, §444). In other words, through its use of the sign at this stage, the intelligence manages to distinguish and define objects within its own activity, but it has not yet achieved the capacity to confirm the correspondence of these objects with external reality. It has not yet unified the subjective and objective elements of its activity completely. At this stage, according to Hegel, spirit is reason, "but formal reason only" (*ENZ III*, §457). As he explains, the work of theoretical imagination abstracts from the whole of spirit's self-recognition. Spirit is still indifferent to its content, and therefore formal and finite:

This inner workplace (*diese innere Werkstätte*) is here to be grasped only according to its abstract moments. As the activity of this unification the creative imagination is reason, but formal reason only, in so far as the content (*der Gehalt*) of the creative imagination as such is indifferent (*gleichgültig*); reason as such, however, also determines the content in its truth (*auch den Inhalt zur Wahrheit bestimmt*). (*ENZ III*, §457; see also §467)

Although the theoretical, formal dimension of spirit is limited, it is also necessary to spirit's development. In order for spirit to realize itself fully, it must view itself *in itself*—that is, as completely detached from the particularities of its experience. However, before spirit can undergo this experience of detachment and fulfill its theoretical potential, it must first develop its capacity for memory and gain a primitive command of the basic building block of language, the name. The sign plays an essential role in both of these developments.

### III. Signs of Memory (*Gedächtnis*) and Language (*Sprache*) (Or, How Does the Intelligence Determine the “Other”?)

Hegel closely associates sign-making representation and memory (*Gedächtnis*). In fact, he virtually defines the two in terms of each other: before memory officially comes on the scene, he states that the activity of sign-making is already “productive memory” (*das productive Gedächtnis*); and he says that memory, in distinction from the various forms of representation, “has only to do with signs” (*überhaupt nur mit Zeichen zu tun hat*) (*ENZ III*, §458). But he does stipulate one important distinction. Whereas the sign marks the externalization of internal determinations, memory reinternalizes or recollects these external intuitions (*ENZ III*, §460). In the first form of memory, name-holding memory (*das Namen behaltende Gedächtnis*), the intelligence takes the intuitions back into itself and makes them its own by raising each particularity into a general, “enduring connection” (*bleibende Verknüpfung*) “in which name and meaning are objectively connected” (*ENZ III*, §461). In other words, memory turns the intuited sign into a representation; or, more accurately, it incorporates the determinate intuited content, its meaning, and the sign that links the two, all into one single, internally concrete representation (*ENZ III*, §462). Two important consequences result: the intelligence gains the capacity to recall the meaning of

names when the corresponding language sign (*Sprachzeichen*) is issued before it (*ENZ III*, §461, Zus.); and, for the purposes of theoretical spirit, the name *becomes* the thing it designates (*ENZ III*, §462). Through its act of memory, the intelligence becomes able to determine its contents more thoroughly than ever.

Moreover, as memory progresses through its course of development and becomes “reproductive,” it becomes able to reproduce the sign’s meaning “without intuition and image” (*ENZ III*, §462). In contrast to the imagination’s reproductive capacity, which had indirect recourse to a merely found intuition, reproductive memory need not even ‘picture’ the thing that the word names. At this stage the intelligence can have a concrete understanding of a given content without the actual thing or any representation of it being intuitably there; the only thing the intelligence needs to conceive the thing is a name or sign—that is, an intuition that it does not merely find but actually *produces* (*ENZ III*, §462). As Hegel explains, “The reproductive memory has and recognizes the meaningful content (*Sache*) in the name and the name with the content” (*ENZ III*, §462). The name is thus “the imageless, simple representation” (*die bildlose einfache Vorstellung*) (*ENZ III*, §462).

The intelligence now determines its contents to a radical degree, but it does not dispense with the sensible as such. Although the sign’s material element is discounted for the sake of clear meaning, the intelligence nonetheless responds to its sensuous contents in their particularity when it names them. It structures the categories of its experience in and through names, determining the raw sensuous material in a way that surpasses immediate experience, but which nonetheless takes off from it. Therefore, even though the name, as a sign, is composed of a material element from which the intelligence necessarily abstracts, the intelligence remains interested in the sensuous content of its experience. Without elements of materiality that impinge upon it, the intelligence would have nothing to name. But, as we shall see, the intelligence’s ability to determine the meaning of these impinging sensations penetrates into their very essence. As

Theodor Bodammer emphasizes, Hegel holds that language mediates the very production of the world.<sup>10</sup> According to Hegel, things exist for humans only in so far as they are known in words (*Phil G*, pp. 228–29).

#### *A. Names, Meaning, and Existence*

Hegel's assertion that the name constitutes the actual existence and presence of things for the intelligence is among the most difficult to grasp. At first, it seems to contradict the commonsense assumption that any given thing would be there whether it is perceived or not. However, when Hegel claims that a given thing is only what it is by being named as such, he makes, by his own admission, a claim about the *merely formal* aspect of spirit (*ENZ III*, §462). It is a claim that has to do with a given thing's determination *as that thing*, not with its simple "being there." But for Hegel, the former claim supersedes the latter. For example, common sense tends to assume that "this book" is "here" whether we call it a book or not. But, in point of fact, "this book" cannot be here *as a book* until it is named as such. For a child whose perceptual and linguistic capacities are not yet developed, some indeterminate 'thing' may be there, but it may be a "toy" or simply a blob of "blue" instead of a book. For someone else who does not know how to read, the same indeterminate thing may be a set of bound papers or a bunch of black squiggly lines; for someone who has received it as a gift but who has not yet opened it, it is not yet a book but only "a gift." Again, for someone else who is engaged in the task of writing rather than reading, it may be simply "a paperweight"; and for yet someone else who has received it within the context of a particular tradition, this same book may be, quite literally, "the word of God." Hegel's point, then, is that immediate being *has no meaning*; it is nothing determinate until is granted the determinations of thought. A thing's character of simply "being there" is not what makes it the thing that it is; it is not what distinguishes it from the other things that are also "there." What distinguishes one thing among others are the determinations the intelligence grants to that thing

through its acts of intuition, representation, memory, and thought. Hence, Hegel does not assert that the name “wipes out” the sensory existent. He merely points out that it places this sensory existent into a mediated, more comprehensive, meaningful perspective. Specifically he argues that language transforms the immediacy into a mediacy and so grants it a more qualified, determinate kind of existence, a “higher” one than it contains within itself (*ENZ III*, §459).<sup>11</sup> Nor does Hegel claim that the intelligence can wish itself whatever it wants, and for example, call the book “one million dollars” and have it be so. In the first place, Hegel never denies that the intelligence is subject to natural determinations; indeed he acknowledges that the intelligence *arises out of* the naturalness of the soul. To repeat, for Hegel, the name only creates the *formal* reality. Theoretically the book could be one million dollars, but on Hegel’s terms, it could not be concretely and truly so unless this determination of the intelligence gained the kind of social agreement that the sign provides, that is, unless the designation of the book as worth a million dollars was confirmed by an objective community. (*Theoretically*, a society could decide that a given book—say one of the handwritten manuscripts of Hegel’s—is worth or has the validity of a million dollars.)

Again, this act of determination, which may seem to pertain only to external objects, also signifies the intelligence’s *self*-determination. Accordingly Hegel asserts that the name establishes the intelligence’s own existence just as much as it indicates the existence of the thing: “The name as the existence of the content in the intelligence is the externality of itself in it, and the internalization of the name as the intuition produced by the intelligence is at the same time the externalization or realization (*die Entäusserung*) in which it posits itself within itself” (*ENZ III*, §462). In reproductive memory, the sign allows the intelligence to recognize the simple identity of its being and so to see its own act as existing. Spirit’s act of naming the contents of its intuitions is therefore a transformation of its own abstract self-reflection as much as a transformation of the immediacy of its intuited content.

More specifically, a kind of mutual determination between the intelligence and words takes place: the intelligence must externalize itself in words in order to be determinate (as the activity it is) and words must be enlivened by the intelligence if they are to have determinate meaning (*ENZ III*, §462, Zus.). On the one hand, the intelligence's externalization and determination of itself in words is "absolutely necessary" for the intelligence's own existence. Only through words does the intelligence's content gain clarity and concreteness. Hegel even goes so far as to say that to want to think without words is "craziness" (*Wahnsinn*) (*ENZ III*, §462, Zus.). "Names," Hegel says, "are [the] condition of thought itself" (*Phil G*, p. 219); "We think essentially in words, names . . ." (*Phil G*, p. 218). Accordingly to Hegel, "Words give thoughts their worthiest and truest existence" (*ENZ III*, § 462, Zus.). On the other hand, and at the same time, according to Hegel, the intelligence's internalization of its own signs in memory gives them a lasting meaning. Thought sustains its words in a living determinate being. ("*So werden die Worte zu einem vom Gedanken belebten Dasein*") (*ENZ III*, §462, Zus.). When thought attends to its words, the words gain an enlivened existence (*ENZ III*, §462, Zus.). "Just as the true thought is the thing (*Sache*), so is the word when it is employed by true thought" (*ENZ III*, §462, Zus.).

### *B. The Symbol and the Sign as Elements of Language*

Thus, as several commentators have noted, Hegel understands the sign to be the basic unit of language. Josef Simon declares, for example, that for Hegel language is a system of signs and the sign is "the general concept for every kind of expression" (*den Obergriff jeder Art von Ausdruck*).<sup>12</sup> Karl Löwith, who tries to view Hegel's language philosophy from the perspective of Locke's nominalism, goes so far as to say that Hegel finds the essence of language in the sign.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, Daniel Cook, who traces Hegel's concept of language throughout his early philosophy, notes the fundamental importance of signification at

every stage and argues that Hegel's discussion of the sign and of language becomes less and less explicit only because he increasingly assumes it as central to the whole of spirit.<sup>14</sup> Further, as we saw in the introduction, Derrida understands Hegel to privilege the name and he criticizes him for assuming that a name may express a clear linguistic unity.<sup>15</sup> Similarly David Krell notes that "Hegel puts all his faith in *names*. The dignity of the word, as a *name*, consists in the simplicity or univocity of its significance, its syllables, its letters, and its resonance."<sup>16</sup>

Hegel, however, does not *reduce* the functioning of language to the transparency of the sign. In his discussion of the advantages of alphabetic languages over hieroglyphic ones, for example, he admits that words do not function in the simple one-to-one correspondence of the sign. Due to the fact that in alphabetical forms of writing each word gains its meaning from the various contexts in which it has been and continues to be employed, he says, the single word or name does not contain its meaning within itself. This view is supported in his *Wissenschaft der Logik* as well, when Hegel speaks of the "advantages" of the German language: "many of its words are of the further peculiarity of having not only various, but even opposed, meanings" (*WL I*, p. 20). According to Hegel, although words gain their meaning by being designated as signs, several dimensions of meaning may be present with every word. This is why Hegel insists that the designations of words have to be explicated and logically systematized; if words corresponded to their meaning in a simple, one-to-one fashion, such explication and systematization would not be necessary. Moreover, even if signs which give words meaning constitute the basic principle of language, they are not sufficient to the functioning of language for Hegel (see, for example, *VPR II*, p. 224–27). Names must be predicated (i.e., formed into sentences) and these sentences must then be recognized as having in themselves limited truth value. Not only is the "is" insufficient to express the development of spirit (*VPR I-s*, p. 192), but so is the very form of the sentence or proposition (*VPR II-s*, p. 205). The symbolic element of language is especially



obvious in the case of poetry, for although Hegel understands poetry to use signs as its basic material (Ä III, p. 227–28; see also VPK 1823, pp. 43–44 ), he also acknowledges that the poetic imagination works *symbolically* (VPK 1823, p. 120). For poetry has as its content “inner representation and intuition itself” (Ä III, p. 229), and, like the symbol, it works “to maintain the middle between the abstract generality of thought and sensuous concrete corporeality” (Ä III, p. 231). It may represent external concrete forms, but only for the sake of *spiritual* purposes (Ä III, p. 239). But Hegel does not limit the symbolic function of language to poetry. In his philosophy of spirit, for example, he contends that “speaking is essentially a symbolization” (*Sprechen schon ist wesentlich ein Symbolisieren*) (Phil G, p. 207).<sup>17</sup> Noting that tones may work together to symbolize meaning, he remarks that “The symbolization of language still goes very far, in that sensible expressions are used [to represent] something of corresponding spirituality” (Phil SS, p. 92).<sup>18</sup> And in his lectures on aesthetics, he goes so far as to claim that “Language in general is metaphorical” (VPK 1823, p. 146; see also VÄ 1820/21, p. 131). Thus, for Hegel, even though language is based upon words and names, which are signs, it also contains an essentially metaphoric, symbolic element.

In light of these aspects of Hegel’s philosophy of language, Frank Schalow suggests that Hegel was actually one of the first modern philosophers to *cease* viewing language merely as an ordering of signs. With Hegel, he says, “Language ceases to be a system of signs to be employed by thinking as a mere tool. . . . Rather, language emerges as having vitality and power in its own right.”<sup>19</sup> For Hegel, thought is best expressed through signs, but these signs may be used in several different ways. They may be systematized by philosophical thought or they may be used to enact ambiguous symbolic transferences of meaning within poetry, language, and thought (as we saw in chapter one).<sup>20</sup> Hegel’s own use of etymological associations and puns reveals the extent of his awareness of these linguistic ambiguities. Donald Phillip Verene draws attention to this fact, pointing out, among other things, that Hegel plays on the

possessive forms of “*mein*” (mine) and “*sein*” (his, its) by using them in conjunction with “*die Meinung*” (opinion, view) and “*sein*” (to be) in its verbal sense.<sup>21</sup> Thus, although the sign is certainly essential to intelligence’s comprehension of itself as the source of meaning and is in this sense the “ground principle” of language, it is not *sufficient* to spirit’s concrete and complete self-recognition.

#### **IV. The Loss of Meaning and the Transition to Thought (Or, How Can Spirit Make Itself Be?)**

As was the case at the prior levels of theoretical spirit, the intelligence’s determination of its content turns out to be its determination of itself as well. Here, by explicitly determining its intuitions in signs, the intelligence determines itself *as determining* and so makes itself what it is (*ENZ III*, §§445, 457). Formally speaking at least, spirit achieves its concept (that is to say, it becomes what it is supposed to be) and brings itself to its truth (*ENZ III*, §445). Through the sign the intelligence becomes able to express its self-identity in the form of an immediate intuition and so finds concrete verification that its subjective determinations constitute objective reality. Specifically, the intelligence expresses its self-awareness, which has the form of reflective self-identity, *in the form of* something that can be immediately found. Comprehending itself now as *both* mediating *and* immediate, spirit identifies its own creative activity with external intuitions. By expressing itself in signs, it externalizes its abstract generality and makes it into something that is (*ein Seiendes*) simply and immediately “there” (*ENZ III*, §457).

However, in order to recognize itself as such, the intelligence must detach itself from its various contents and reflect upon itself directly. It must, in other words, let go of the meaningful connections it has established and view itself independently of them. For as long as it holds its contents in view, it remains externally directed, distracted from itself, and unaware of the full actuality of its own existence. Thus,

according to Hegel, the intelligence must go through a stage in which it loses contact with its past experience and identifies itself with the mere externality of its signs. It must empty itself of its former identifications and face itself as an abstract power of determination. Here, as spirit undergoes a complete loss of meaning, it resorts to a mechanical regurgitation of empty signifiers. At this point the arbitrary relation between the immediate external expression and its clarified meaning—the relation which defines the sign as such—breaks down, and spirit gains a sense of itself as existing apart from the images and representations it previously associated.

According to Derrida, however, when spirit undergoes such losses, it does so only as *an investment* in life or in meaning; it never *really* suffers the risk of ultimate loss because it knows itself to be able to recover all that from which it detaches itself. To be sure, spirit does recuperate its losses as it progresses to thought, returning with a more complete sense of itself and gaining back the contents of its experience. But the question, as Derrida puts it, is whether spirit can be assured of this recovery “at the moment when meaning is lost.”<sup>22</sup> Does spirit suffer a true alienation from itself and its contents? Does it run a real risk of getting stuck in the abyss of meaninglessness? In the following section, as we examine Hegel’s discussion of mechanical memory and spirit’s transition to thought, we will see that for theoretical intelligence as Hegel describes it, the risk is real. Spirit cannot know *in advance* that it will find itself again; it suffers a period of alienation without knowing that its mechanical exercise will yield a return. Nonetheless, once spirit reaches its full development in thought, it can grasp the necessity of its self-recovery from a retrospective point of view.

### A. Mechanical Memory

When spirit pushes the positive determinacy it gains through words to its extreme, the negativity of theoretical spirit’s act of determination comes to the fore. This move from reproductive to mechanical memory results from the

intelligence's over identification with the externality of words.<sup>23</sup> Instead of creating and employing connections between its various determinate representations and the intuitions—that is, instead of creating and using signs—the intelligence forgets the difference between its internal act and the words' external being, focusing exclusively on the latter. Now too familiar with its signifiers, the intelligence employs them *without attending to the signified meaning* it has given them. The precision of meaning that spirit created for itself in the sign is thus exchanged for a total emptiness and lack of meaning. Not only does the whole sign relation break down, but the intelligence also loses its own inner determinacy and becomes an “empty bond” (*leeres Band*) or thoughtless thought. It reduces its own subjectivity “to a completely empty, spiritless, container of words” (*zu etwas ganz Leeren, zum geistlosen Behälter der Worte*) (*ENZ III*, §462, Zus.). Having broken from all of its past experience, theoretical spirit no longer has any meaningful form with which to identity itself. As Stephen Houlgate explains, “At this point, the mind as we know it in imagination and recollection—that is, the mind animated by meanings—disappears, and the mind becomes a simple, mindless, spiritless machine.”<sup>24</sup> Without any meaningful content to animate its subjectivity, spirit loses contact with its own sense of identity as well as with its power to form images, representations, and names. These powers do not diminish into nothingness, but they cease to be recognized by intelligence as part of itself.

During this period of self-alienation, spirit can have *no idea* that its meaning and sense of self will return. Preoccupied with the exercise of memorizing streams of meaningless words, it has no way of foreseeing the result of the process. Empty of all meaning, it cannot, *at this moment of loss*, conceive of anything like an investment or delayed gratification; it cannot conceive how its experience of utter meaningless could ever have any value. If it could do this, it wouldn't be functioning *mechanically*. Thus, as Houlgate notes, mechanical memory as described by Hegel turns out to be “the very thing Derrida said Hegel could not think,

namely: 'a machine defined in its pure functioning, and not in its final utility, its meaning, its result, its work.'<sup>25</sup> As long as spirit is involved in performing acts of mechanical memory, it cannot know itself as capable of or even in pursuit of meaning. It is, so to speak, simply too busy—consumed by the exercise of trying to remember series of meaningless signs. This does not mean that spirit digresses into nothingness, for as mechanical memory it remains active and this activity constitutes its existence. But spirit clearly experiences itself *as alienated from its former self-conception*. It finds itself completely *other* than it previously knew itself to be, now that it performs a completely *different* kind of activity. Up to this point it had understood itself solely in terms of its ability to make meaningful connections, but it now experiences itself as totally empty—a “completely abstract subjectivity” (*ENZ III*, §463).

For Hegel, however, this “meaningless” process does turn out to have meaning: mechanical memory “works” for spirit, allowing it to bring “the unity of its subjectivity and objectivity into existence” (*Phil G*, p. 222). Precisely through its experience of alienation, theoretical spirit becomes able to recognize itself as real. Through this thoughtless exercise—that is, through the experience of *thinking itself not thinking*, through its experience of throwing around empty words and then reflecting upon this play—the intelligence discovers a whole new understanding of itself and its creative power. Before the work of mechanical memory, it had no sense of an “I” independent of the images it connects and the signs it designates. But by reciting empty words (i.e., thinking thoughtless thoughts) and *becoming conscious of itself as doing so* spirit learns how its activity is independent of the content it chooses. By mechanically working upon the pure externality of its words, theoretical spirit identifies itself with this pure externality and thus comes to see itself as existing in this form. “In this way,” explains Hegel, “the excess of the internalization (*Übermass der Erinnerung*) of the words changes, so to speak, into the highest externalization (*Entäusserung*) of intelligence” (*ENZ III*, §462, Zus.). By turning completely inward and

functioning without any meaningful external content, the intelligence becomes able to contact itself in a way it never had before. As a result it comes to see that its inner activity also has external objective existence. By letting go of its subjective conceptions, it becomes able to grasp what it means for a thing to be in its immediacy, independent of the intelligence's mediation, and consequently to conceive of itself as "being" in this sense. In this way spirit manages quite literally "to make itself be." It conceives itself as existing, and needs only to unite this conception with the drive and desire of practical will (*ENZ III*, §465).

### *B. Spirit's Theoretical Determination*

Through its exercise in mechanical memory, the intelligence discovers the theoretical identity of its subjective content and objective being and so becomes "thought." Technically, memory is only the external form of this identification, but since spirit experiences itself in mechanical memory as functioning in a purely external nonsubjective way, memory leads to the realization that external objectivity exists within subjective spirit (*ENZ III*, §464). This fact is already implicit in intuition, when the intelligence posits what is immediately given and external within itself, but it becomes explicit (i.e., recognized by spirit) only when the intelligence externalizes itself in mechanical memory (*Phil G*, p. 222). Once the intelligence has done this, it can be sure that its interior space has external reality and that its exterior content may be determined by its own act of knowing (*Phil G*, pp. 222, 174–76). As Hegel puts it, the intelligence "knows that what is thought *is*, and what *is*, only *is* to the extent that it is thought" (*ENZ III*, §465). Having experienced the full extent of its power of determination, it "knows *itself* as the nature of the *thing* (*Sache*)" (*ENZ III*, §465, Zus.).

By this, Hegel does not mean that thought constitutes the existence of things by creating their materiality out of thin air or by changing one thing into another.<sup>26</sup> What he means is that thought determines the existence of its sensuous other by applying its categories of meaning to them

and giving them the formal structure by which they can be known (*ENZ III*, §467). Accordingly, Hegel emphasizes, spirit knows “that *for it*, the content is determined through it” (*daß für sie der Inhalt durch sie bestimmt ist*) (*ENZ III*, §468, Zus; *Phil G*, p. 224). Hegel’s claim, in other words, is that thought has the power to determine *the truth* of things (*ENZ III*, §465, Zus.). While sensation and representation may prove mistaken or merely fantastic, thought is in the position *to test the validity* of its content—that is, to consider whether its content corresponds to its concept and thus is more than merely finite and immediate (*Phil G*, p. 228). Having now recognized itself as possessing external reality as well as subjective interiority, thought is capable of distinguishing between that which is merely subjective and that which also has objective reality, and it can distinguish between that which is merely immediate and that which has substantial existence. More importantly, since it has experienced itself as “being” in an immediate, external way, theoretical spirit now realizes that what “is” in this apparently foreign and accidental way is not something essentially other than itself, but something *that it can know*. Indeed, it now recognizes such immediacy as *part of its own determination*, for it knows itself not just as an act, but as an act that is really and immediately “there.” For this reason Hegel asserts that thought is “the comprehensive unity of itself over its other, being” (*übergreifende Einheit seiner selbst über sein Anderes, das Sein*) (*ENZ III*, §465). It now knows itself as capable of comprehending immediacy, which first seemed to be completely other than it (*Phil G*, p. 224).

In a certain sense, then, thought does assimilate, or take up into itself, sensuous immediacy. Indeed, as Hegel contends, the very task of the intelligence is to posit its other, the immediate, as its own (*Phil G*, p. 237). This assimilation or appropriation is not, however, the consumption or destruction of the sensuous other, for the intelligence *works to preserve* the truth of that which it encounters as immediate. To be sure, the intelligence imposes its own sense of what constitutes truth; it provides the “concept” to which the content must correspond if it is to be counted as worthy of

preservation. In placing "the other" on its own terms, then, the intelligence does not preserve the indeterminacy of the sensuous, but by bestowing the sensuous with names and thus with determinacy, it grants the sensuous a kind of existence it could not otherwise have (*ENZ III*, §459). Far from wiping out the particularity of its content, spirit actually allows this particularity to achieve a larger existence by placing it within the whole of its general form (*ENZ III*, §467). For example, by naming colors or defining shapes, the intelligence transforms the corresponding blur of sensuous experience into something that can be distinctly remembered. True, in the process spirit may dismiss certain sensuous experiences as irrelevant to its development. But even this does not amount to a consumption of "the other," for as we have already seen, when spirit withdraws its attention from its sensuous objects, it merely lets them go their own course as the finite, vanishing immediacy they are.

Moreover, since spirit now comprehends the general form of such immediacy, it is capable of recognizing mere immediacy as part of itself. In other words, spirit recognizes that its own activity presupposes the appearance of otherness. During its intuiting, representing, and remembering activities, spirit remains partly dependent upon the "otherness" of its content. That is to say, its content is, to some extent, given to it rather than determined by it. But since spirit needs to "be" in the form of mere immediacy as well as in and through its act, this otherness turns out to be an essential part of what spirit is. In this respect Derrida is correct to note that Hegel conceives no such thing as an other of spirit that would not be "its" other, a radical negativity that does not serve spirit's own development.<sup>27</sup> Even the sensuous, which first appears to be other than spirit, turns out to be part of spirit's process of self-determination. But spirit does not "consume" this other: it *recognizes itself* in it. It realizes that this "other" is relative to its own activity by comprehending that it too has a kind of immediate existence.

Thus, once again, spirit's determination of its content is at once its determination of itself. By acting upon its content and recognizing it to be of its own making, spirit brings



itself into existence. Through its acts of memory and naming, it makes itself into the an activity of mediation and through its meaningless externalization of itself in mechanical memory, it makes itself into something that is simply and immediately there. As a result, theoretical spirit becomes what it was supposed to be according to its concept: a power of determination that is both mediating and immediate. This does not mean, however, as Derrida would say, that spirit becomes what it “always already” was, for spirit *really has to* become. It undergoes real risk and real alienation, for it *experiences* its other as real and *does not always know* that it will recover its losses and achieve self-reconciliation. It is only *after* spirit “finds itself” again that it discovers the whole process to have been necessary. Once it recognizes itself as that activity that becomes, that creates itself, it grasps that a period of not being itself is essential to this process.

However, thought’s realization of its freedom is only the first step towards spirit’s absolute realization: “Thought has only thoughts as its result; it reduces (*verflüchtigt*) the form of reality to the form of the pure concept” (*Ä III*, p. 244). Even at this point, spirit’s existence is merely “formal” (*Enz. III*, §465; see also *Ä III*, p. 244). In order to determine itself fully, thought must go on to determine itself as will (*Wille*) (*Enz. III*, §468, §468, Zus.). In other words, after completing the task of determining the immediate as its own, theoretical spirit must develop *the will* to realize its freedom in the realm of reality (*ENZ III*, §469; *Phil G*, p. 237). Through its theoretical development, the intelligence determines its purpose to be free, and it recognizes its power to make its subjective ideas real. But in order to bring its determinations and its idea of freedom into “the present world,” spirit must combine its theoretical experience with its drive and desire and become “practical.” This combination of theoretical and practical elements enables subjective spirit to reach its fulfillment, but it still does not indicate the ultimate realization of spirit. “Subjective spirit is productive,” Hegel notes, “but its productions are formal”; it produces “merely its ideal world” (*ENZ III*, §444)—that is, ideas and purposes

that must still be realized on the communal level of *objective* spirit. In order to achieve its "absolute" manifestation, spirit must complement its subjective activity with its objective, ethical dimension. (Although the practical and ethical dimensions are certainly necessary to spirit's development, they extend beyond the scope of this project because they do not contain elements of spirit which Hegel acknowledges to be explicitly symbolic.) However, it is only through the absolute forms of art, religion, and philosophy that spirit achieves its full realization. The following chapters will focus on spirit's development in and through these absolute forms in order to show the great extent to which the symbolic element, which has been surpassed by theoretical spirit's affinity for the sign, returns as an essential factor in spirit's ultimate constitution. We shall see, in other words, that while Derrida is correct to point out the key function of Hegel's concept of the sign, he does not adequately consider the ways in which the alienating, ambiguous, and finite aspects of the symbolic pertain to spirit's absolute determination.



## Chapter Three



### Spirit's Symbolic Self-Presentation in Art

In his *Lectures on Aesthetics* (*Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*)<sup>1</sup> Hegel confines his explicit treatment of the symbolic to two of the lectures' three main topics. He discusses the symbolic element of art in his section on the particular (*besonderen*) forms of artistic beauty as well as in his systematic presentation of individual (*einzelnen*) arts, but he excludes it from his discussion of the idea and ideal of artistic beauty.<sup>2</sup> For Hegel symbolic art refers to a distinctive form of art's conceptual development which finds its characteristic expression in the cultures of the orient and in the particular art of architecture, but which falls short of art's ideal reconciliation of form and content. In contrast to ideal art, which fuses its form and content so as to communicate the whole truth of the spirit that permeates it, symbolic art merely hints at a truth that its sensuous presentation cannot adequately express. In short, symbolic art sustains precisely that opposition between form and content that ideal art reconciles.

By opposing symbolic art to ideal art in this way, Hegel dismisses the question of art's generally symbolic nature (*Ä I*, pp. 404–405). Recognizing the popularity of this view and responding directly to Schlegel's suggestion that every artwork should be interpreted as an allegory with a rational meaning behind it, he argues that the inclination to see art as merely symbolic derives from the understanding's tendency to "hurry quickly to the symbol and the allegory" (*Ä I*, p. 405). Accordingly, instead of considering how and to what extent art might be symbolic, Hegel begins his discussion of the particular types of art by considering to what extent the symbolic

might be artistic. In contrast to Schlegel and unlike most of the thinkers of his time,<sup>3</sup> Hegel proposes an aesthetics governed by the supreme reconciling power of reason. As he contends, reason's capacity extends beyond the understanding's fixation with the oppositions of form and content, expression and meaning, exterior and interior. Reason grasps the concept of a sensuous presentation that *is* its spiritual meaning, a form that *is* its content. Consequently, Hegel's philosophy of art recognizes art forms besides those that *symbolize* their content. In addition to the symbolic form of art, his aesthetics treats the classical form, which expresses art's ideal, and the romantic form, which displays art's general limitation.<sup>4</sup>

Clearly, then, Hegel's explicit account of spirit's artistic development limits the symbolic to a certain, less-than-ideal form of art. As such, the symbolic serves as the indispensable conceptual presupposition and historical precursor of art's ideal. However, as this chapter will demonstrate, the importance of the symbolic for Hegel's aesthetics extends beyond the significance he explicitly attributes to this particular form. Indeed, Hegel's basic concept of art bears a striking similarity to his notion of the symbol. Part one's discussion of Hegel's general concept of art will highlight this obvious—yet widely overlooked—correspondence. Then, part two will analyze spirit's development through the various symbolic art forms in order to show how each of these forms grants spirit a unique occasion for self-knowledge and thus serves to constitute a necessary aspect of its absolute self-determination. In parts three and four, the great importance of the symbolic for Hegel's aesthetics as a whole will become even more apparent through analyses of the classical and romantic forms of art. For as we shall see, even though Hegel understands the classical and romantic forms to be superior to symbolic art in some important sense, these later historical forms preserve art's symbolic element in several important ways. Moreover, as part five will suggest, Hegel's understanding of art as developing historically toward its “dissolution” (*Auflösung*) places even the classical and romantic art forms into a broader perspective that reveals the sense in which they too are ultimately symbolic in his sense

of the term. To be sure, for Hegel the classical and romantic forms are not symbolic with respect to the aesthetic meaning they intend to express, but they *are* symbolic with respect to what Hegel considers the more complete truths of revealed religion and absolute philosophy. This means that with respect to Hegel's whole system, art turns out to have a specifically *symbolic* function after all. Though Hegel considers symbolic art to be opposed to ideal art in a certain respect, his philosophy of art does not leave this opposition unresolved. Instead, his aesthetics points out the historical and contextual relativity of art's symbolic element; it shows that whether or not art is experienced symbolically depends upon the *Weltanschauung* of its viewers. Accordingly, Hegel's claim that ideal art must "dissolve" does not indicate art's ultimate doom, as some commentators have suggested:<sup>5</sup> it merely refers to the fact that we moderns are bound to experience art's absoluteness *symbolically*.

The symbolic thus turns out to be much more important to Hegel's philosophy of absolute spirit than we may at first be inclined to realize. The fundamental role that the symbolic plays in the "absolute" form of art testifies to the fact that absolute spirit's mediation occurs through symbols as well as through signs. This is a basic point that commentators such as Derrida who understand Hegel to conceive of spirit as mediated by the sign have tended to overlook.

## I. Art in General

### A. *Art as the Presentation of Spirit*

Hegel's lectures on aesthetics deal primarily with what he considers "fine" or "beautiful" (*schön*) art—art that concerns itself with the truth of spirit (*Geist*). In his view, such art constitutes a significant way in which spirit expresses itself to itself, a necessary means by which spirit makes itself fully and concretely what it is. Pertaining essentially to spirit's capacity for self-creation, art comprises a realm of absolute spirit: it enables spirit to raise itself above the

finite, to gain access to its being in and for itself, and so to become free (Ä I, pp. 130–31, 139). As a form of absolute spirit, art can be conceived only in connection with spiritual meaning. Accordingly, art achieves its own end—the fusion of form and content—in and as it expresses the movement and repose of spirit. Its primary purpose is not the imitation of nature, the awakening of feelings, the mitigation of desires, or the teaching of moral perfection. Art's ultimate aim is simply and solely *the presentation of spirit* (Ä I, pp. 64–82).

According to Hegel, art, religion, and philosophy all serve this purpose of presenting spirit to itself—that is, of bringing “the divine, the highest interest of human beings” to consciousness (Ä I, pp. 21, 139). Each of these three realms of absolute spirit has spirit as its content, but each presents spirit in a different way (Ä I, p. 139). Art's particularity lies in its presentation of spirit in *sensuous* form. Enabling spirit to appear in the immediate form of sensible intuition (Ä I, pp. 139–40; VPK 1823, p. 18), art accomplishes the “production” of the beautiful, “the sensuous *appearance* of the Idea (*das sinnliche **Scheinen** der Idee*)” (Ä I, p. 151). This “appearance,” however, does not connote an opposition to reality and truth. Quite to the contrary, as Hegel demonstrates in both his *Wissenschaft der Logik* and his *Phänomenologie* and as he reiterates here, “appearance” is *essential* to truth: “Indeed the *appearance* (**Schein**) itself is essentially the *essence* (**Wesen**); the truth would not be if it did not appear” (Ä I, p. 21).<sup>6</sup> While Hegel does acknowledge the sense in which the immediacy of the transient world may be designated as a “mere” appearance or illusion, he asserts that art transforms this empirical world and gives it “a higher, spiritually born reality” (Ä I, p. 22). Art offers us an experience of freedom, harmony, and wholeness that tends to escape us in our day to day living.<sup>7</sup> It re-presents our fragmented experiences in the form of a unified totality.

### B. Art as Symbolic

Hegel's understanding of fine art as that which presents spiritual ideas in sensuous form lends itself to easy comparison with his general definition of the symbol. As we

have already seen, Hegel defines the symbol as an immediate expression (*Ausdruck*) that *indicates* a meaning (*Bedeutung*) it does not actually *contain* (*Ä I*, pp. 393–95). Unlike the sign, whose expression is indifferent to its meaning, the symbol refers to its significance through qualities contained in its immediate presence. Even as the symbol makes this identification, however, its appearance remains ‘other’ than its intended meaning. It identifies its meaning only partially, never corresponding with it completely.

For Hegel, art too indicates a meaning it does not actually contain: its appearance identifies a meaning that remains in some sense ‘other’ than it. As Hegel maintains, art’s appearance has “a higher, deeper sense and meaning” (*einen höheren, tieferen Sinn und Bedeutung*) than its immediacy explicitly manifests (*Ä I*, pp. 139–40). A “doubleness” (*Gedoppeltes*) belongs to the concept of art: “*first* a content, a purpose, a meaning, *then* the expression, the appearance and reality of the content” (*Ä I*, p. 132). Art does not “want” to make its pure concept apprehensible in general, intellectual terms; its aim, rather, is *to unite* its general intellectual concept *with an individual appearance* (*Ä I*, p. 140). Like the symbol, art has the specific task of communicating meaning *through* an immediate material presence (*ENZ III*, §558).<sup>8</sup> As is the case with the symbol, the sensuousness that constitutes art’s immediacy “points beyond itself” to a more clarified content. In fact, for Hegel, this function of indicating is precisely what distinguishes art from nature: “The appearance of art has the advantage that through itself it points beyond itself to something spiritual which is supposed to come to representation through it” (*Ä I*, p. 23); “the interior shines in the external and gives itself to be known through it; the external points beyond itself to the interior” (*Ä I*, p. 37). For this reason, in the introduction to his lectures on aesthetics, Hegel explicitly compares the structure of art to that of the symbol. As he observes, when we approach both the symbol and the work of art, we first encounter what they present to us immediately, and then become moved to consider an *other* meaning or content beyond this immediacy: “For an appearance that means something does not present itself and what it is externally, but



rather an other (*ein anderes*); as the symbol, for example, . . . constitutes its meaning" (*Ä I*, p. 36). Because the immediate external presentation does not have any clear value or meaning for us, we look for an other, internal meaning. In this sense, art's "doubleness" pertains even to classical art, which perfectly fuses its immediate form and its inner meaning. Even though *the form* of classical art is "self-referential," and "self-signifying" (*sich selbst Bedeutende* and *sich Deutende*) (*Ä II*, p. 13), its *materiality* points beyond itself to an "other" meaning. A bronze or marble material that forms the figure of Apollo, for example, evokes a meaning that the material itself does not contain. Through its form the material evokes "the idea" or "spirit" of Apollo, but it never *becomes* Apollo. No matter how well-worked it is, the material remains different from the spirit it lets appear. Even if the material is formed so as to express the intended content of the art work perfectly, the formal distinction between the art work's content and its material remains.

Moreover, as is the case with the immediate presence of the symbol, art points beyond itself *through its own particular qualities*. Its sensuous presence cannot be *any* sensuous presence, but only one whose form is appropriate to the artwork's spiritual content. Again, in this sense art works more like a symbol than a sign. Art cannot express its particular meaning through an expression that is wholly indifferent to that meaning like the sign does. Rather, as Hegel stipulates, art must "*do more than serve as a mere sign* and give its meaning a *corresponding* sensuous presence" (*Ä II*, p. 272, emphasis added). Even in its ideal form, art is not indifferent to its content (*Ä II*, p. 401). In its presentation of a particular concrete manifestation in the place of a more general idea, art must *identify* the particular with the general. According to Hegel, art's concreteness functions precisely to make this identification with the generality of its being. "The prevailing of this general power is exactly what art emphasizes and lets appear" (*Ä I*, p. 22). However, art's transformation of the particular into the general differs notably from science's transformation of empirical facts into universal laws. As Hegel emphasizes, art does not change the sensuous into something completely different or nonsensuous. Rather, art *identifies*

the sensuous with spirit. Like the symbol, art communicates its meaning by manifesting a connection between its immediate sensuous presence and its intended or interpreted spiritual meaning. To be sure, art takes the sensuous beyond "mere" sensuousness, but in so doing it does not cancel or delete the sensuous element. On the contrary, the particularity of the sensible form is necessary to the determination of the concrete spiritual meaning: the sensible particulars "call forth" the general meaning. As Hegel explains, "these sensible forms and tones occur not merely on account of themselves and their immediate form, but with the purpose of granting in this form the satisfaction of higher spiritual interests, since they are capable of calling forth from all the depths of consciousness a suggestion and reminiscence in spirit" (Ä I, p. 61). As is the case with the symbol, the particular qualities of the material that make up the artwork serve to evoke a meaning that transcends the artwork's actual existence. For this reason, during his analysis of theoretical spirit in his *Enzyklopädie*, Hegel explicitly categorizes artistic work as the product of the symbolic imagination: he identifies the imagination that produces symbols as the part of the imagination that constitutes art (ENZ III, §456, Zus.). Like art, this "*symbolizing, allegoricalizing, or poetical imagination*" "displays the general or the *Idea* in the form of sensible existence" (ENZ III, §456, Zus.). In fact, according to one version of lecture notes, Hegel explicitly says, "Symbolization belongs to the poetic imagination, [to] art in general" (*Phil G*, p. 207). Indeed the symbolic nature of art for Hegel is so pronounced that Paul de Man proposes that Hegel's definition of beauty as "the sensuous appearance of the idea" "could itself be translated by the statement the beautiful is the symbolic."<sup>9</sup> As de Man notes, "The theory of the aesthetic, as a historical as well as a philosophical notion, is predicated, in Hegel, on a theory of art as symbolic."<sup>10</sup> Just as the symbol conveys both more than its own immediate presence and less than its intended meaning, art expresses something in between its concrete materiality and its conceptual generality. Therefore, like the symbol, art necessarily entails ambiguity. As Charles Taylor observes, "Hegel points out that a work of art which is merely meant to say something which is already

clear in thought is without interest. . . . lack of definition and reflective unclarity are essential to art. . . . Where we are conceptually clear, the work is superfluous. It becomes, as Hegel says, an empty husk.”<sup>11</sup> According to Hegel, art displays a sensuousness that is “freed from mere materiality,” and that “stands in the middle of immediate sensibility and ideal thoughts” (*Ä I*, p. 60). Art “takes up the appearance of sensuousness,” but it nonetheless remains the product of *spirit* and not of nature or “natural” genius (*Ä I*, p. 27). Although the work of art is necessarily sensible, its sensuousness exists as a work of art only in so far as it is *for* spirit and not *just* sensuous (*Ä I*, pp. 57, 102). Like the symbol, art is always more than its immediate presence; through the qualities of its expression, it allows a spiritual idea to appear in sensuous form.

### C. Art as Necessary and Dissolving

Hegel expressly maintains that art is an absolute “need” of spirit (*Ä I*, pp. 50–52). Spirit needs art in order to reconcile its idea (*Idee*) and its actuality (*Wirklichkeit*) and become what it is supposed to be according to its concept. Through art spirit heals itself of the division between its apparently conflicting aspects—finite and infinite, sensible and supersensible, divine and human, ideal and real (*Ä I*, p. 21). Having its purpose in “the sensuous presentation (*Darstellung*) of the absolute,” art gives spirit “the sensible imaged shape” (*die sinnliche bildliche Gestalt*) it needs in order to be the “free reconciled totality” it is (*Ä I*, p. 100). However, for Hegel, spirit’s self-reconciliation is at once human consciousness’s recognition of its own creative capacity. According to Hegel, due to the fact that human beings are thinking beings, they have the need to be free—that is, to determine their own existence and make themselves “for” themselves. As thinking beings, humans must activate their spiritual side and *create themselves*. Practically speaking, Hegel says, human beings accomplish this goal by intentionally altering external objects and then recognizing themselves—their “spirit”—in these altered objects. By producing art, human beings make their spirit into an object for their consciousness; they externalize themselves and then recognize themselves in this external-

ization (Ä I, pp. 50–52). Through this recognition they reach the higher spiritual dimension of themselves. “Natural things are only *immediate* and *singular*, but the human being as spirit *doubles* himself (*verdoppelt sich*) in that he at first is as a natural thing, and then however is just as much *for himself* (*sic*)” (Ä I, p. 51; see also VPK 1823, p. 13). Only through this process of externalization or “duplication” do human beings make themselves free. Only by witnessing their own ability to have material effects—that is, by undergoing the work of self-expression—can they determine themselves to be the creative activity Hegel calls “spirit.” By producing art, human beings produce their spirit.

According to Hegel, this process of human creation and spiritual reconciliation takes place in and through history. In other words, art's conceptual development toward its ideal concurs with its progress through various historical cultures and epochs. As art attempts to bring spirit to full sensuous presentation, it takes on various forms depending on the degree to which it grasps “the idea” and expresses it in concrete form (Ä II, pp. 15, 128; Ä I, p. 107). By Hegel's account, spirit progressively embodies itself in the symbolic, classical, and romantic forms of art—forms that represent the “striving, achieving, and surpassing of spirit's ideal” respectively (Ä I, p. 114). Eventually, however, art's content develops beyond what its form actually can express. In other words, its content outgrows its form and the perfect harmony of ideal art becomes impossible. Therefore, even though classical art manages to present its intended content perfectly, it nonetheless turns out to be inadequate to what Hegel considers the “higher” truths of religion and philosophy.

Thus, in Hegel's view, art's conceptual development entails its historical “dissolution” (*Auflösung*). After art reaches its historical peak in the classicism of Greece, it begins to display the inherent limitation of its form and ceases to communicate the highest truth of humanity (Ä I, pp. 141–42). In other words, its social and spiritual function loses its status as the most important medium of spirit. This “breakdown” of art indicates the conceptual limitation of the art form in general. It signifies the fact that even when spirit achieves ideal artistic unity, it does not accomplish its full

manifestation or complete self-determination. Art reveals spirit in sensuous form, and is therefore necessary to spirit's self-expression, but it is not sufficient to it. It is the medium for spirit's *sensuous* self-determination, but it cannot express the whole of spirit's supersensible reality. As is the case with the symbol, art's immediate presence communicates its meaning through qualities that identify with it, but it also conceals or distorts that meaning through qualities that differ from it. Expressing both a resemblance and a dissimilarity to the whole truth of absolute spirit, art suffers from the same limitations as the symbol: it fails as a means to spirit's full, transparent self-knowledge. Just as the specific qualitative identities and differences involved in symbolization call for clarification, art presents a content that needs to be complemented by religion and philosophy because it only partially identifies the truth of spirit. Even when art's form expresses its content as well as it possibly can be expressed in the sensuous medium, it points *symbolically* to a more complete truth. Like the symbol, the artwork invokes something more than itself; it "is essentially a question" (*eine Frage*), "an address" (*eine Anrede*), "a call" (*ein Ruf*) (*Ä I*, p. 102). According to Hegel, those of us who have been exposed to the truths of revealed religion and absolute philosophy, can see—indeed *must* see—art's sensuous presentation as a partial distortion of the truth of spirit's inwardness. In other words, we moderns are bound to consider even ideal art *symbolic*.

## II. The Symbolic Form of Art

### A. *Symbolic Art's Lack with Respect to Art's Ideal*

At the beginning of his discussion of the symbolic form of art, Hegel clarifies his aim to regard the symbolic only in so far as it may be said to comprise a form of art in distinction from the classical and romantic forms (*Ä I*, p. 405). While these later forms of art may themselves be determined by Hegel's whole system as 'retrospectively' symbolic, the form of art Hegel specifically names "symbolic" is sym-

bolic in a further sense as well: it is symbolic *with respect to its own aesthetic content*. Unlike the classical and romantic types of art, which succeed in effecting "the sensuous appearance of the Idea" (*Ä I*, p. 151), symbolic art manages only to set the appearance and the Idea in an unresolved opposition. Better considered as a kind of "pre-art" (*Vorkunst*) or "a mere attempt" (*ein blosses Suchen*) at art, symbolic art strains toward art's ideal fusion of content and form, but fails to achieve it (*Ä I*, pp. 408, 107). According to Hegel, this form of art is epitomized in the particular art of architecture, which "gives itself to be thought" by indicating an idea it does not expressly contain and by serving a purpose beyond its immediate presence (*Ä II*, pp. 269, 273–74). In general, symbolic art remains "only the struggle and the striving" after the ideal of art and the idea of spirit (*Ä I*, p. 107). Accordingly, Hegel asserts that although symbolic art can *suggest* something of the life of spirit, it cannot manifest spirit in its harmony, wholeness, and truth.

Hegel considers the various forms of symbolic art to be lacking with respect to both content and form. The content of symbolic art derives from an idea of spirit that is lacking with respect to differentiation, clarity, concreteness, or positivity. In other words, it is based upon a vague and incomplete notion of human individuality. This conceptual lack necessarily leads to a formal deficiency. Precisely because symbolic art is based upon an idea it does not concretely grasp, it cannot represent the idea adequately in material form. Instead of producing a harmonious unity of form and content, the spirit of symbolic art takes on what Hegel considers to be strange and extreme forms.

Nonetheless, despite these undeniable limitations, symbolic art constitutes an indispensable part of spirit's development. By working itself through various oppositions of form and content, spirit tests the extent of its identity with nature and discovers its difference from it. Although its forms fail to manifest fully the idea toward which they strive, symbolic consciousness's various attempts to concretize its idea gradually lead it toward a more precise conception of this idea. This clearer conception of the spiritual

idea leads in turn to a greater consciousness of the limitation of the symbolic forms it uses. Through its various acts of symbolization, spirit moves itself toward a progressively clearer idea of itself as well as a more complete artistic expression of itself. Symbolic art serves therefore as the necessary historical precursor of ideal art.

But it is also more than this. Symbolic art accomplishes part of spirit's *absolute* self-determination. Through symbolic art spirit gains the experience of knowing itself in a form *other* than transparent thought, and this experience of knowing itself *not* knowing (i.e., 'thinking itself *not* thinking') is essential to its being as absolute. For, as Hegel insists, "the power of thinking spirit lies *not only* in grasping *itself* in its characteristic form as thought, but just as much in recognizing its expression (*Entäußerung*) in sensation and the sensible, grasping itself in its other" (Ä I, 28). In other words, the power of spirit lies in its ability to confront its negativity, and through symbolic art spirit confronts its negativity in a number of concrete ways. Unlike the mere immediacy of nature in which spirit cannot know itself at all, the mediation of symbolic art allows spirit to know itself *as incomplete*. Spirit is not simply self-alienated: *it encounters itself as such*. Through symbolic art spirit learns to identify itself with nature to various degrees, even as it feels the tension of being in and through its "other."

### B. The Different Forms of Symbolic Art

The opposition between significant content and expressive form serves as the focal point of Hegel's entire analysis of the symbolic type of art. According to Hegel, the content and form of symbolic art struggle against each other, and the different ways in which they do so comprise the various instances of the symbolic type of art (Ä I, pp. 411–12). The first phase of this "battle" (*Kampf*) between form and content occurs in what Hegel categorizes as "unconscious" symbolism. At this stage no conscious awareness of this struggle between content and form exists. Indeed, according to Hegel, the symbols "are as yet not *posited* as symbols at all" (Ä I,

p. 412). The symbol simply expresses and reinforces the *identity* between form and content without suggesting the difference between them. Then, as spirituality progresses, the symbol's inherent discrepancy between form and content becomes recognized as a limitation in its expressive ability, and spirit develops the need to make this limitation explicit. This necessitates the movement to the "sublime" kind of symbolization (*die erhabene Kunst*), wherein the other side of the symbol—the *difference* between significance and form—is expressed (Ä I, p. 412). At this stage, the spiritual significance is portrayed as separate from the sensuous immediacy that symbolizes it as a mere negative. Lastly, in conscious symbolism, the symbol's inherent conflict is recognized as such. In this type, *both* aspects of the symbolic—the *identity and the difference* between form and content—are made explicit. Through its practice of symbolization, artistic consciousness becomes aware that what it is doing is *making a comparison* between two separate things that share a basis for association. With this final stage of symbolic art, a positive significance is realized as distinct from (though related to) its immediate sensuous expression, and the "comparative type of art" arises (Ä I, p. 413). Since in Hegel's account, these comparative forms of the symbolic do not pertain directly to spirit's artistic development and since these have been discussed in chapter one, the following analysis is restricted to a consideration of the unconscious, sublime, and conscious forms of symbolism.

According to Hegel, the very first kind of symbolism consists in the "immediate unity" (*unmittelbare Einheit*) of the sensuously present and the spiritually significant. This unity represents the inherent affinity between the spiritual and the natural without recognizing a difference between the immediate presence of nature and the further significance of spirit (Ä I, p. 419). Consequently, as Hegel notes, although we moderns are inclined to "read in" a distinction between the interior and the exterior at this early stage of symbolism, the thought of a "significance" distinct from immediate presence had not yet arisen at this stage of historical consciousness. Technically speaking, "real symbolism"



had not yet developed. Rather, "the phenomenon is itself conceived as the immediate reality and presence of the Absolute," and the absolute is thought to be immediately in the phenomena (*Ä I*, pp. 419–20). The natural is conceived as spiritual, and the spiritual is conceived as natural (*Ä I*, p. 420). This immediate, unconscious identity of the natural and the spiritual is only symbolic "for us" who also recognize the difference between nature and spirit and who have the religious and philosophical experience which enables us to understand the natural as representing the spiritual.

For the same reason that this unconscious identity cannot be truly symbolic, it cannot be real art. According to Hegel, under such an immediate conception of the unity of the sensuous and the spiritual, neither symbolism nor art can "really" take place (*Ä I*, pp. 425–28). Like the symbol, art presupposes the differentiation between spiritual and natural, content and form, and meaning and expression. As Hegel conceives it, real art proceeds from the recognition of a separation or antagonism between the sensuous and the spiritual. Only by beginning with such a division, can art then *fuse* significant content and expressive form. Only by recognizing a conflict between the spiritual and the sensuous can it creatively *reconcile* them. By Hegel's definition, art is the *occurrence* of truth and the *work* of a developing spirit—precisely *not* something that is simply or naturally "there." Yet the external forms of what Hegel calls "unconscious symbolism" are not produced by spirit, but simply understood to be spirit in their immediacy. "The sensuous presentation (*Darstellung*) is not fashioned, formed, fabricated out of spirit as art requires, but immediately in the external existence found and declared (to be) the adequate expression" (*Ä I*, p. 428). Nonetheless, even though it is not the product of spirit's conscious activity, this awareness of an immediate unity of spiritual content and natural expression provides the necessary "basis" (*Grundlage*) for real symbolism and real art (*Ä I*, p. 418). It is spirit's first attempt to unify itself with nature, to be in and through its 'other'.

In Hegel's view, the ancient Zoroastrian religion of Persia expressed itself in unconscious symbolism. According to Hegel's suspect historiography, the Zoroastrians did not per-

ceive or acknowledge a difference between spirit and nature but rather grasped the two in an immediate, undifferentiated unity.<sup>12</sup> For example, instead of recognizing the natural phenomenon of light as an image of the good, the Zoroastrians understood all natural forms of light such as the sun, stars, and fire to be the good itself (*Ä I*, pp. 420–22). Perceiving an immediate unity between content and form and between significance and expression, the Zoroastrians lacked sufficient consciousness even to realize the *need* for art; they lacked the need to *create* this unity of nature and spirit. In addition, besides judging the Zoroastrians as falling short of art's ideal on the basis of undifferentiated content and the failure to *produce* a unity of form and content, Hegel also supposes them to lack a developed concept of individuality. For example, as he interprets their religious mythology, the figure of Ormuzd lacks real subjectivity and personhood because he is the mere "personification" of light (*Ä I*, p. 421). In contrast to the gods of classical Greek art whose "essential" feature is their subjectivity and individuality, Hegel sees the Zoroastrian god Ormuzd as "essentially" the natural phenomenon of light and only "inessentially" subjective and individual. Through this kind of symbolism, spirit sees itself as identical to light without grasping the important sense in which it is superior to this natural phenomenon.

As Hegel construes this early Persian religion to be aware of a merely immediate identity, he sees the Hindu culture as presenting only a "vague" and "confused" difference between content and form (*Ä I*, pp. 433, 437). With a seemingly limitless effort, the fantastic imagination struggles to produce an image that can breach the gap between spiritual content and sensuous form and so dissolve the tension of spirit's self-alienation. But this struggling only reinforces the underlying division. As Hegel describes it, the bumbling, almost frantic imagination propels a "restless, hasty jump from one extreme to the other," surging with such confusion that it "inverts" and "distorts" them both (*Ä I*, pp. 431–32). Consequently, instead of unifying content and form, this kind of art actually accentuates the contradiction between them (*Ä I*, p. 431). The more the imagination struggles to unite form and content, the more "wild"

and fantastic its forms become. Lacking a determinate conception of the spiritual and simply imagining the absolute as the nonsensuous, the nonimmediate, or nonnatural, Hindu symbolic consciousness produces art which is in Hegel's estimation at once too abstract and too immediate (*Ä I*, pp. 430–33). As Hegel explains, Hindu art tries to join the natural and spiritual by extending its images quantitatively instead of qualitatively; it tries to compensate for a lack of determination of content through extreme forms, distorted images and giant dimensions. The Hindus try, for example, to represent their intuition that the divine is not completely commensurable with the external human form by presenting figures with several heads or several arms (*Ä I*, p. 437). Even in and as it strives for unity through the symbolical form, the fantastic imagination effects nothing but the heightening of discord and the proliferation of "distortions" (*Ä I*, p. 432). "The particular forms . . . become massive, grotesque, wildly pulled apart" (*Ä I*, pp. 436–37), Hegel says.<sup>13</sup> Spirit thus experiences its being in and through its other as extremely alienating.

Moreover, these forms fail to be truly and consciously symbolic because they do not reflect the difference between external form and intended spiritual meaning. According to Hegel, in real symbolism the particular existences (*die besonderen Existenzen*) are not supposed to *be* the meaning; they are only supposed to suggest (*andeuten*) it (*Ä I*, p. 436). Yet Hegel sees the Hindus as identifying the divine with various natural objects without acknowledging the divine's superiority to them (*Ä I*, p. 436). He claims, for example, that the Indian ideal of the unity with Brahman is an unconscious unity that deletes the determinacy of personality and fails to convey true spiritual individuality (*Ä I*, pp. 433, 439–40). Hegel judges the external form of the Hindu religion to fall short of being art on the basis of the same failure to recognize the difference between spirit and nature. With only a dim conception of the difference between the natural and the spiritual, the consciousness of the Hindus cannot produce the concrete unity of these determinations. For Hegel, the only hope for such a resolution lies in the development of a positive determinacy of spiritual significance.

Spirit moves beyond this mere affirmation of the contradiction between its meaning and expression when it recognizes its negativity to be part of a larger whole—that is, when it begins to understand the absolute as a process that negates and integrates its moments in the course of its self-determination (*Ä I*, pp. 449–51). At this level of spirit's development, “the death of the natural becomes known as a necessary part of the life of the absolute” (*Ä I*, p. 450). Death comes to be seen as having a “double meaning” (*gedoppelte Bedeutung*): it *is* what it immediately seems to be (death), but it is *also* something more (a moment of the life of the absolute) (*Ä I*, pp. 450–51). This basic insight into the ambiguity of immediate existence conditions the rise of “real” (*eigentliche*) symbolism and of real art. Spirit comes to see itself as *both* resembling nature and differing from it. Recognizing the inadequacy of mere immediacy to its whole significance *along with* its need to present itself in an immediate form, spirit comes to understand its immediacy as having a positive significance beyond the negativity to which its transience attests. Now grasping the difference between spiritual significance and sensuous form, spirit begins to realize that it can reconcile this opposition through the work of art: “the identity of meaning (*Bedeutung*) and real existence is no longer an *immediate* unity (*Einigung*), but one *created* out of the discrepancy between the two; it is not simply found, but *produced* out of spirit” (*Ä I*, p. 453). Moreover, as a result of the greater degree of consciousness involved in real symbolism, a more rational process of selection replaces the haphazard to and fro movement of the presymbolic forms. Consciousness can now determine which symbols are more adequate to the content it means to convey (*Ä I*, p. 453).

Art thus begins when spirit gives significance to that which is immediately present—that is, when spirit creates symbols. With symbolic, artistic consciousness, “The imagination (*Phantasie*) makes itself then a second form, which does not have itself for its purpose, but is just used for the intuition (*Veranschaulichung*) of a significance related to it” (*Ä I*, p. 453). However, as Hegel specifies, at this stage in art's development, artistic consciousness does not first envision a significance and then proceed to create an adequate

form. Rather, consciousness begins with the sensuous existence which is at hand and works on it in such a way that it attains a meaning beyond itself (*Ä I*, pp. 453–54). These forms are inadequate to spirit because they do not derive from a totally clear and free spirit, but they do indicate a deeper, more comprehensive meaning than they immediately present (*Ä I*, p. 454). They grant spirit the experience of wonder, and they point spirit on toward further development.

According to Hegel, the art work of Egypt represents “the perfect example” of this stage of art’s development (*Ä I*, p. 456). With the cultural achievements of Egypt, the “real” symbol first emerges because *both* its positive and its negative aspects are acknowledged. However, since the symbol does not in itself clarify which of its qualities contribute to its meaning and which are accidental to it, its positive and negative aspects remain in a restless opposition. On the one hand, spirit becomes conscious of itself only through its symbolic manifestation in external immediacy, and therefore remains dependent upon it. On the other hand, this symbolic manifestation partly confuses spirit’s attempt at self-recognition. For this reason spirit tries to free itself from it. Spirit thus appears to move in two opposing directions: while it strains to incarnate itself in the sensuous existence, it also struggles to contact itself independently of any externality. The internal spiritual meaning begins to assert its autonomy over its external manifestation, but it manages to do so only in so far as it opposes (and so remains bound to) the symbol’s external immediacy. Due to this double, conflicting movement, symbolic art necessarily appears enigmatic (*Ä I*, p. 465). Spirit presents itself as *both* opposed to *and* bound up with its external manifestation.

The Egyptian symbol actually thematizes the problem of symbolism as such, according to Hegel. The Egyptian sphinx, for example, communicates spirit’s “task” (*Aufgabe*) to discover its meaning and is thus “a symbol for symbolism itself,” (*Ä I*, p. 465). Similarly, the Egyptian pyramids are symbols for symbolism, the perfect image of symbolic art: “The pyramids present before our eyes the simple image (*das einfache Bild*) of symbolic art” (*Ä I*, p. 459). On the one hand, the pyramids reveal a belief in the immortality of the

soul—an indication that spirit has moved toward greater self-knowledge and freedom (Ä I, p. 458). On the other hand, they exhibit the Egyptian conception of the interior as that which opposes external reality (Ä I, p. 459). Since the pyramids contain lifeless remnants that are conceived as having spiritual significance, they are, in effect, “enormous crystals which harbor an inwardness within them (*welche ein Inneres in sich bergen*) and surround it as an outer form (*Außengestalt*) produced through art” (Ä I, pp. 459–60). Hence, like Egyptian symbolism in general, the pyramids exhibit a paradox: they determine a positive spiritual significance, but they articulate this significance *as that which lies dormant within*. For this reason Hegel concludes that spirit has not yet really found itself “for itself.” It only realizes that it must try to do so. According to Hegel, in Egyptian art spirit presents itself to itself as a problem it cannot solve: “Egypt is the land of symbol, which poses to itself the spiritual task of the self-deciphering of spirit (*der Selbstentzifferung des Geistes*) without really achieving the deciphering” (Ä I, pp. 456–57). This posing of the problem, however, indicates to Hegel an important advance over the Hindus, whom he believes were not clearly aware of the conflict inherent to their symbolism. As a result of this new awareness, the Egyptians become capable of conceiving a somewhat determinate spiritual significance, though not yet an essentially positive one.

The enigmatic nature of Egyptian symbolism is in Hegel's view equally apparent in Egyptian figures of personification. Although these figures receive a determinacy beyond the complete abstraction of those of the Hindus, Hegel holds that they remain relatively obscure and superficial. Instead of expressing the spiritual idea of concrete individuality, they convey human subjectivity as inessential to their being. For example, even though Osiris is understood as having the subjective ability to judge the dead, he is just as typically conceived of as the sun, the rise and descent of the Nile, and other forces of nature. Therefore, Hegel concludes that his subjectivity is not essential to his being (Ä I, pp. 462–63). Furthermore, according to Hegel, when Egyptian art does express a more determinate human

subjectivity, it conceives it as having an external source rather than as being subjective in and for itself (Ä I, p. 462). This external subjectivity is found most overtly in the Egyptian use of Memnonic figures, who are understood to gain subjectivity only by the light that shines upon them from the outside (Ä I, p. 462). In one way or another, says Hegel, they fail to convey a sense of inner animation; the figures are “colossal, grave, hardened; legs without freedom . . . arms and head closely and firmly locked to the rest of the body without grace and lively movement” (Ä I, p. 464). In Hegel’s view, even though the spirit of Egyptian art has begun to feel the need to express itself as distinct from nature, it has not yet developed the capacity to express itself from *within* itself. The idea of spirit as concrete subjectivity has not yet been born.

Notwithstanding, Egyptian symbolism marks a positive development for spirit. Even though artistic portrayals of the human form fail to reflect the movement of life, the very fact that spirit is more frequently and more realistically portrayed in human form indicates to Hegel a great advance over the distorted presentation of the Hindus. Moreover, Egyptian symbolism gives spirit a unique occasion to experience conflict, struggle, and perplexity. Due to the extreme tension of this artistic form, spirit experiences its conflict with nature as *overt*, its longing for resolution as *acute*, and its confusion in the face of questions as *conscious*. It knows its own lack in a way it never has before.

Spirit is thus impelled to make some radical progress toward the development of its concrete subjectivity. Specifically, by Hegel’s account, spirit proceeds to express itself in various “pantheistic” and “sublime” forms. First, through different kinds of religious and mystical poetry, the symbolic consciousness of pantheism conceives of spirit as inhering in all of nature. At this stage of its artistic development, spirit undergoes the unique experience of being at one with nature, even while it has some degree of conscious self-determination. However, as Hegel emphasizes, this unity lacks profundity, for it forces spirit into complete abstraction. In pantheistic symbolism spirit lacks the deter-

minacy that is its defining characteristic, and its conception of itself as totally immanent in nature obscures the sense in which it is also distinct from nature. Through pantheistic symbolism, then, spirit encounters the limit of an indeterminate, meaningless identification with nature. At the same time, it begins to assert its power above nature and so moves toward the other extreme of self-definition. Spirit perceives that if it is to express itself in accordance with the autonomy it intuits itself to have, it must determine itself *solely within itself*, apart from all of nature.

This realization gives rise to what Hegel calls "sublime" symbolism. In stark contrast to the poet or mystic of pantheistic symbolism, the artist of sublime symbolism conceives spirit as the absolute creator, utterly separated from the world of its creations (Ä I, p. 466). This purely spiritual essence stands in complete opposition to the natural world, which can only symbolize it negatively (Ä I, pp. 478–79). Lacking any significance of its own, the immediacy of the sublime symbol expresses *only that it cannot express* the fundamentally other "One." In other words, because it has no *intrinsic* expressive capacity, the symbol can symbolize only the "essential and active transcendence" of the One. It can manifest nothing of itself except that it is "powerless" and "vanishing" in relation to the one all-important substance (Ä I, p. 479). At this level of consciousness, the work of art becomes understood as "the outpouring (*Erguß*) of pure essence," but it manifests this essence specifically by showing *the inadequacy* of its form to the meaning of the substantial One (Ä I, p. 480). The incompatibility of the form and content that characterizes the symbol is thus affirmed to the highest degree (Ä I, p. 480). At the same time, however—and for precisely this reason—sublime art emphasizes spiritual significance to an unprecedented extent. Unlike prior forms of symbolic art that focused attention on the immediate expression, sublime symbolism draws attention explicitly toward the spiritual meaning that lies beyond it. Thoroughly subordinating form to content and the sensuous to the spiritual, it expresses spiritual significance *per se* (Ä I, pp. 479–80). To be sure, sublime symbolism brings the



spiritual to the fore in a wholly negative manner (*Ä I*, pp. 479–80). But precisely for this reason, spirit gains a positive identity, “a meaning for itself, separated off from the whole appearing world” (*Ä I*, p. 466). Accordingly, Hegel asserts that although the previous forms of symbolical art attempt to express “sacred” (*heilige*) content, sublime art alone grants it due respect (*Ä I*, p. 480).

The Hebraic tradition exemplifies the art of sublimity for Hegel because the Hebrews represent spirit as a creator God, completely removed from his created world and completely beyond the expressive capacity of humans.<sup>14</sup> While this has the great advantage of highlighting the spiritual as such, it effects an artificial distinction between the human and the divine, the spiritual and the natural. As Hegel interprets it, Hebraic poetry conceives of the divine as a unified, ruling substance withdrawn from its creatures rather than as a spirit incarnated in them (*Ä I*, p. 469). Similarly, the Hebrew scripture depicts nature and humanity as alienated from the divine through their own finitude and negativity (*Ä I*, pp. 478–483). According to Hegel, Hebraic symbolism can never symbolize this removed content positively or directly; all it can do is symbolize finite creatures’ *relation* to it (*Ä I*, p. 478). Hebraic art therefore falls very short of offering a representation of real, complete individuality. Considered merely in opposition to the “One” infinite substance of the universe, the individual is conceived as purely finite, negative, and transient (*Ä I*, p. 484). Nevertheless, in its conception of the individual as redeemable through the saving power of the law, Hebrew culture paves the way for what Hegel considers a more complete conception of individuality (*Ä I*, p. 485).<sup>15</sup>

### *C. The Importance of these Symbolic Forms*

As we have seen, the different forms of symbolic art each make an essential contribution to the progress of spirit. Specifically, they each allow spirit to experience a different degree of identification with nature. Through the unconscious symbolism of the ancient Persian Zoroastrian

religion, spirit recognizes a kind of immediate identity with nature. Then, through the fantastic expressions of Hinduism, spirit comes to see its tremendous difference from nature. Later, in the conscious or "actual" symbolism of Egypt, as spirit begins to reconcile these conflicting experiences of identity and difference, it realizes two complementary things: 1) that its identity with nature is not an immediate one but one that must be established through spirit's conscious mediation; and 2) that its difference from nature is not quantitative but qualitative. Having recognized both its identity with and difference from nature, spirit then alternates between the extremes of each. In pantheism and mysticism spirit identifies itself with nature in the most complete sense possible until it discovers the great limit of this identification. Then in Hebraism spirit differentiates itself from nature in the most radical way until it discerns the necessity of establishing a kind of identity as well. Finally, by the time spirit reaches the level of comparative types of art, it has discovered the specificity of both its identity and its difference from nature as well as the limitation of the symbolic form in general. As a result spirit moves on to the classical form of art and restricts its act of symbolizing to "superficial" and "subsidiary" subjects.

Nevertheless, the unconscious, sublime, and conscious forms of symbolic art contribute to spirit's process of self-determination by gradually allowing spirit to identify *its own act* as the appropriate content of art. In addition, to the extent that these forms constitute the place of spirit's failure at complete self-identification, they furnish spirit with the invaluable experience of being incomplete. In other words, they enable spirit to know itself *as self-alienated*. In symbolic art spirit partially identifies itself, but in this process it also misidentifies itself; it vaguely conceives of itself as the self-knowing power that it is, but at the same time, it recognizes that it does not know itself as such. Precisely because these symbolic forms correspond only partially to the idea of spirit, they grant spirit the unique occasion of experiencing itself in a form through which it *cannot* think. Through its various acts of symbolization, the

thought that will later ‘think itself thinking’ gains the experience of thinking itself *not* thinking. It gains the concrete experience of being-limited in its power of self-determination. But this limitation is just as much a positive possibility, for it is only through this experience of limitation that spirit can discover the full extent of its power. Through its concrete manifestations in the various symbolic arts, spirit gains the experience of alienation and self-loss, an experience which it internalizes and transforms into a positive aspect of its absolute self-determination.

### III. The Classical Form of Art

#### A. *The Supersession of Symbolic Art’s Deficiencies*

In Hegel’s judgment classical art overcomes the shortcomings of symbolic art. While the conceptions of spirit that underlie symbolic art lack either differentiation (Zoroastrianism), concreteness (Hinduism), clarity (Egyptian symbolism), or positivity (Hebraism), the conception of spirit that underlies the production of classical art is concretely differentiated, clear, and affirmative. As Hegel explains, classical art uses the human form to *present* the full unity of the human and the divine, whereas symbolic art uses animal forms and images of nature to *represent* the divine (*Ä II*, pp. 46–47). For Hegel, then, the Greeks’ *humanistic* conception of the divine is what enables them to conceive of spirit as concrete and knowable. By transforming the material of the natural religions into gods with individual characters, classical artistic consciousness is able to resolve the opposition between form and content that symbolic consciousness produces and sustains (*Ä II*, p. 94). By combining a clear concept of spirit as subjective individuality with its corresponding human form, the classical artist transcends the “superficial” use of the human form in personification and expresses spiritual individuality directly and completely.<sup>16</sup>

As the beneficiary of symbolic consciousness’s various struggles to unite the natural and the spiritual, classical

culture is able to begin its work with a conception of spirit as inhabiting the particular individual human. Whereas symbolic art derives from an understanding of spirit as abstract, mysterious, and removed from human reality, classical art assumes the divine to be concretely knowable, possessive of the thoughts and desires of individuals, and participant in human affairs (Ä II, pp. 51, 54, 79). Unlike symbolic consciousness which only struggles toward a clear conception of its content, the classical artist finds its content already expressed in the religion, tradition, and cultural imagination of the times. The conception of the gods as having individual personalities, as Hegel observes, manifested itself in Greek culture before its era of great art. It was well worked-out in Greek mythology and cultivated in the people through religious practices, such as the visiting of oracles, before the artist began his or her task (Ä II, pp. 51–52). Accordingly, Hegel claims that classical art begins with the concrete idea: it has “the true content of art”—“substantial subjectivity” (*substantielle Subjektivität*) for its meaning (Ä I, pp. 109).

The diverse conceptions of spirit held by symbolic consciousness and classical culture lead to a great difference in concrete formulation. Whereas symbolic art lends itself to distortions of an idea it only vaguely grasps, the classical artist simply carries out the mandate of a preclarified content (Ä II, pp. 21, 27–28). No longer having to try to define their content, classical artists can concentrate on the technical execution of a form that corresponds to it (Ä II, p. 28). Specifically, they can concentrate on *individualizing* what is already given in abstract generality (Ä II, pp. 78–79). In contrast to the Egyptian artist whose aim is simply to perpetuate a “static type” (Ä II, p. 448), the classical artist works to make the spiritual content his or her “own” (Ä II, p. 28). Free of formal prescriptions, classical artists can imbue the general content of art with their own individual spirit (Ä II, p. 448).

As a result, unlike symbolic art, which inevitably confirms the opposition it seeks to resolve, classical art resolves the difference between its immediate expression and the

meaning to which it refers such that its meaning is nothing but “what actually lies in the external form (*Gestalt*)” (Ä II, pp. 19, 75). In contrast to symbolic art whose immediacy contains qualities that do not pertain to its intended meaning, the immediacy of classical art does not have any meaning distinct from its spiritually intended one (Ä II, pp. 14–15). According to Hegel, the classical artist strips away all of the formless, accidental, and confusing elements of the symbolic form and preserves only those sensible qualities that pertain to the work’s essential meaning (Ä II, p. 73). For this reason, Hegel says, “With this manner of representation there is, in relation to the external, no longer anything symbolic present” (Ä II, p. 22). All that is unclear and accidental to spiritual content ceases to have meaning. Classical art brings about “the absolute unification” of form and content, meaning and sensuous existence (VPK 1823, p. 154) and so produces the most lively and the most beautiful effect (Ä II, p. 25). In Hegel’s judgment, “There can and will not be anything more beautiful” (*Schöneres kann nicht sein und werden*) (Ä II, p. 128). Classical art accomplishes art’s ideal: it externalizes its inner concept positively and fuses its form and content perfectly (Ä II, pp. 74, 83). It is, according to Hegel, what art *is supposed to be* according to its concept. Classical art contains subjective individuality, the “true” content of art, and it displays this content in perfect harmony with its natural form (Ä II, p. 13).

Classical art achieves its great success, Hegel suggests, because it uses the human form—the form that allows spirit’s freedom to appear in its entirety (Ä II, pp. 74–75, 83). According to Hegel, the body is the “natural existence of spirit” (*Naturdasein des Geistes*) (Ä II, p. 21) and spirit is immediately present in it (Ä II, p. 22). The human form thus transcends symbolic meaning and serves as “the mirror of spirit” (VPK 1823, pp. 132, 157–58; Ä II, p. 21).<sup>17</sup> Though Hegel acknowledges that cultures of symbolic art also use the human form, he contends that its use of natural and animals forms are more characteristic.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, he insists that when symbolic art uses the human form, it does so in order to represent something *other than* the

human. Sometimes, as Hegel believes is the case with the Hindus, this use of the human form results in “measurelessness” and “unruly productions” that preclude the balance and harmony appropriate to inner subjectivity and real freedom (*Ä II*, p. 77). More commonly, it means the use of the human form in order to present abstract ideas or general qualities, instead of the human itself. In Hegel's view, these personifications can only express spirit in a formal and superficial manner (*Ä II*, p. 47). Instead of expressing the unity of the human and the divine in the spiritual individuality of the subject, they express some abstract quality of the divine (i.e., goodness, power, etc.) Such personifications do not pervade their content; they do not make individuality existent (*Ä II*, p. 47).

By contrast, when classical art uses the human form, it refers to nothing except genuine human subjectivity: it *presents* true subjectivity in the form of natural, existing human individuals (*Ä II*, pp. 47–48). Accordingly, Hegel insists that the Greek gods must be understood as free, determinate, and existing individualities from which no general meaning may be abstracted (*Ä I*, p. 406; *Ä II*, p. 82). As he maintains, even when the Greek gods are associated with abstract qualities or concepts, these remain accidental to their existence as “true individualities.” Similarly, according to Hegel, accidental characteristics such as the particular hair style with which a god may be portrayed do not have symbolic meaning but contribute to the determination of the gods as individuals (*Ä II*, pp. 89–100). Hegel notes that in a systematic and monotheistic order (as in modern times), these “true individualities” would in fact be reduced to allegorical, finite, and abstract forms. But, as he explains, the Greeks' polytheistic and unsystematic mythology allows them to present “true individualities” in many forms because it determines each individuality as divine and therefore as a “whole” (*Ä II*, pp. 88–90). This combination of generality and specificity is in fact what gives classical art “infinite security and rest, carefree blessedness, and uninhibited freedom” (*Ä II*, p. 82). The subjective power of the Greek gods does not depend upon anything external, but belongs to each individuality as

its substance (Ä II, p. 82). As Hegel insists, the Greek gods are of “*substantial* individuality which takes itself back out of the colorful appearance of the particular . . . [and] rests securely on its own generality as on an eternal, clear foundation” (Ä II, p. 82).

In Hegel’s view sculpture is the particular art most suited to the classic ideal. It unites art’s ideal content, the idea of subjective individuality, with the highest natural form, the human body, and it does so in such a way that the two merge into a single, intuitable whole (Ä II, pp. 49, 373). Sculpture “gives us the spiritual form in complete corporeality (*Leiblichkeit*), as it is” (Ä II, p. 353); its portrayal of the body in three-dimensional space enables it to be especially true to nature and so to present “the *actual* existence of spirit” (Ä II, pp. 366, 357). In other words, those immersed in the ancient Greek worldview could experience spirit as actually present in the work of art. Sculpture is also especially well-suited to ideal art because its use of the human form allows it to express the universality and the particularity of spirit at once (Ä II, pp. 351–54). According to Hegel, sculpture represents the qualities that belong to individuality *per se*, not those qualities that are particular to some individuals but not to others (Ä II, p. 365). Sculpture presents “the corporeality of the spiritual” in its general form (Ä II, p. 373). Moreover, sculpture lets subjective individuality appear in sensuous form with the greatest possible degree of independence, harmony, and permanence (Ä II, p. 373). It has, for example, a greater independence from its surroundings than architecture as well as a lesser dependence upon the participation of the viewer than painting (Ä II, p. 352; Ä III, pp. 17–18). Sculpture is able to present spirit as “resting with itself” in and through material form (Ä II, p. 379).

Reaching its highest level in sculpture, classical art thus overcomes all of the deficiencies of symbolic art: it begins with a clear idea of spirit; it gives this idea its perfectly corresponding form; and it accomplishes a concrete expression of spirit as human individuality. Fully uniting its form and content, classical art supersedes the symbolic form. (Ä II, p. 29). Indeed, *with respect to its own essential content*,

classical art acts more like a sign: its immediate presence functions *only* to express its spiritual meaning. However, as we shall see, not only does classical art contain symbolic elements, but it eventually gives way to a larger perspective that reveals its own symbolic dimension.

### *B. Symbolic Elements of Classical Art*

There are several senses in which classical art preserves art's "symbolic" dimension, even on Hegel's terms.<sup>19</sup> Most obviously, the symbolic form of art serves as classical art's historical precursor and conceptual presupposition. As Hegel insists, the success of classical art thoroughly depends upon the cultural heritage of symbolic consciousness (*Ä II*, pp. 33–34, 94–96, 375). Classical art achieves art's ideal precisely by developing the content and transforming the form of symbolic art (*Ä II*, pp. 73–83). Following Friedrich Creuzer's contention that the Greek gods have their sources in Oriental, Indian, Egyptian, and Middle-Eastern traditions,<sup>20</sup> Hegel maintains that the classical artist takes the material and images of symbolic consciousness as his starting point (*Ä II*, p. 76). Specifically, the Greek poet transforms these symbolic forms and personifications so that they correspond with the Greek idea of subjective individuality already present in the myth and religion of the people (*Ä II*, pp. 76–77). As Hegel puts it, the Greek poet "individualizes" the material from other cultures and brings out its true human form (*Ä II*, pp. 78–79). Symbolic art also serves as a necessary predecessor to this ideal art by presenting the classical artist with the task of resolving its discrepancy between form and content. As Hegel notes, classical art requires the preexistence of symbolic art, the kind of art that "just intimates" (*nur andeutet*) its meaning: "Thus art is at first hieroglyphic, not an accidental and arbitrary sign, but an approximate drawing of the object for representation" (*Ä II*, p. 375). The classical artist then transforms this approximate representation into an ideal one: the ambiguity of the symbolic form gives way to a form that adequately expresses the spiritual content of



subjective individuality (*Ä II*, pp. 94–96). However, it is important to note that classical art does not eradicate the difference between sensuous form and content: it only reduces the difference to a merely formal one (*Ä II*, pp. 20, 83). Indeed, Hegel maintains that a difference between spiritual content and sensuous form exists in classical art to such an extent that the spiritual content communicates an independence from the sensuous even while thoroughly permeating it (*Ä II*, pp. 84–85). This formal difference *is* not essential to the Greek experience of art, but as we will see, it *is* essential to the modern experience of Greek art.

Hegel acknowledges the preservation of the symbolic in classical art in another sense as well. The classical artist creates ideal art not by eliminating symbolic components completely, but by reducing them to “inessentials” (*Beiwesen*) or “side pieces” (*Nebensachen*) (*Ä II*, p. 83; *Ä I*, p. 406). In Hegel’s estimation, these “residues of the symbolic” (*Reste des Symbolischen*) neither effect the significance of the classical artwork, nor serve as a source of potential confusion for the Greeks (*Ä II*, p. 20; *Ä I*, p. 401). Hegel asserts, for example, that although the contents of the Greek “mysteries” were handed down through tradition in symbols, this indeterminate content is trivial with respect to the classical work of art (*Ä II*, p. 66). Similarly, Hegel maintains that the eagle pictured next to Zeus and the doves associated with Aphrodite do not themselves represent the divine; they are merely details that neither add to nor take away from the sculptural presentation of the individuals (*Ä I*, pp. 406–407). In short, Hegel judges whatever symbolic meaning might remain in the classical work to be incidental to the meaning that inhabits the essential form (*Ä II*, pp. 74–75). As he contends, even though the spirituality of the Greeks remained based in nature, they did not consider natural things themselves to be spiritual or divine (*Ä II*, pp. 69–70). Therefore, even while the gods were often associated with natural things, they were never *limited* to them. Accordingly, while Hegel admits that there is something symbolic in Homer’s association of Apollo with the summer heat, he insists that this association is accidental to the sub-

stance of Apollo's being. On this point, Hegel's distinction between the cultures of symbolic art and Greek classicism parallels his distinction between Persian personification and the Greek presentation of "substantial" subjectivity. Whereas Hegel interprets the Persian conception of Ormuzd as a simple personification, he understands Apollo to be both the sun and *more* than the sun: "One can say in fact that he is the sun and is not, since he does not remain limited to this natural content, but is raised to the meaning of the spiritual" (*Ä II*, p. 71). In both cases the light or the sun serves to symbolize the god, but, according to Hegel, this symbolization is essential to Ormuzd's being, while it is inessential to Apollo's. The case is similar with regard to Hegel's distinction between Indian and Egyptian uses of the human form on the one hand, and Greek presentation of it, on the other. Hegel argues that Indian and Egyptian art fail to present "substantial" human individuality because they associate spirit just as typically with other natural forms as they do with the human.

What these examples show, however, is that Hegel's claim that classical art "supersedes" the symbolic art form rests upon his distinction between "essential" and "inessential" uses of symbols as well as upon his distinction between "substantial" and "superficial" uses of the human form. With regard to the latter point, Hegel himself admits the difficulty in making such a distinction, although he believes himself to have managed it in the end (*Ä I*, p. 407). The simplicity of Hegel's distinction, however, is thrown into question by the fact that Greek mythology often *does* present the divine in forms other than the human. Hegel probably would count Zeus's becoming a swan in order to mate with Leda as "inessential" to his character, but the question is certainly debatable. Similarly, whether Apollo's subjective individuality is more significant to the Greek imagination than his symbolic associations with the sun, light, truth, music, and healing is worthy of discussion. Indeed, Hegel himself suggests that the distinction between what is essential and inessential, substantial and accidental, is not absolute when he discusses the reason for classical art's decline. As we shall

see, the era of classical art ceases as a result of an “accidentality” obscured by its particular form, yet essential to the truth of spirit (cf. *Ä II*, p. 108).

Hegel also admits that Greek art is founded upon a particular kind of “ambiguity” (*Zweideutigkeit*) that he sees as inherent to the symbol (*Ä I*, p. 401; *VPK* 1823, p. 121). As we saw in chapter one, in addition to the ambiguities that arise from the symbol’s failure to clarify the specific nature of its identification with its meaning, the symbol also fails to announce itself as a symbol. Unless one is already privy to the symbolic intention that lies behind the symbol, one can never be sure whether the form is simply to be accepted in its immediacy or whether it is to be understood as having a symbolic meaning (*Ä I*, p. 397). According to Hegel, the case is the same with regard to the classical images of Greek mythology. The myth itself does not tell us whether we are supposed to stay on the literal, external level or if we must look for a further, deeper meaning; it does not tell us whether we should take it literally or read it symbolically (*Ä I*, pp. 401–402). This duplicity or “double view” (*gedoppelte Ansicht*), Hegel admits, extends to the plastic arts in so far as their spiritual expression is related to and dependent upon Greek mythology; although classical art “is on the whole the clear art,” it contains “a side of ambiguity” (*VPK* 1823, p. 121).

Moreover, although the form of classical art presents its content ideally, it is *not* indifferent to its content in the way the sign’s form of expression is indifferent to its meaning. In other words, even though the classical work of art *makes its meaning immanent* in its expression like the sign does, the classical work of art does not function on the basis of the *arbitrary connection* of meaning and expression which characterizes the sign. Rather, as Hegel makes quite clear, the ideality of the classical form *depends upon a resemblance of meaning and expression*. In this sense, although Hegel does not draw explicit attention to the point, the classical work of art functions more like a symbol. As we have already seen, Hegel emphasizes that the subjective individuality that classical art portrays cannot be portrayed in just *any* form. Of all

conceivable natural and animal forms, only *the human* form is suited to convey this spiritual content. Far from being indifferent to the form of its presentation, then, spirit's complete appearance in art *requires* this specific form. Nor is this requirement accidental or arbitrary. On the contrary, spirit takes the human form for a very specific reason: *it identifies with the subjectivity inherent to this form.*

Hegel makes further stipulations as well. Besides insisting *that* the human form be used in classical art, he also recommends that the human form be portrayed in a certain way. In the first place, he contends that in order to be ideal, the human form must be shown "at rest" rather than in the midst of conflict. Again, this insistence is hardly an arbitrary one: the form must be at rest so that it may identify with and express the harmony of spirit. Hegel also suggests that the success of classical sculpture depends upon its use of particular facial features, whose external appearances he connects to the significance of spirit through resemblance. Thus, even though he denies that these sculptural forms "point" to their meaning in the way that the symbol points to its meaning, he does draw symbolic connections between the qualities of the immediate form of classical art and the qualities he attributes to spirit. In other words, he sees the immediate characteristics of classical sculpture as representing "other," more general qualities of spirit. For example, when Hegel observes that the ideal sculptural form exhibits a pronounced forehead rather than a protruded nose and mouth, he does so because he takes the latter to be characteristic of animals and the former to be a quality that distinguishes humans from animals. In his view, the human face of the sculptural work receives its spiritual character through the greater pronouncement of the forehead and the withdrawal of the nose and mouth because the forehead, eyes, and ears pertain more to spiritual functions than the nose, mouth and chin do (*Ä II*, pp. 383–87). With the same logic, Hegel also specifies other qualities, which he sees as representing the spiritual aspect of human beings: a forehead that is neither arched nor high, eyes that are large, open, oval, in a right angle with the forehead-nose line, set

back deeper than they are in nature (Ä II, pp. 391–92).<sup>21</sup> In addition, the chin should be full and the face should be oval with “sharp, pointed, and angled features” that harmonize with one another. According to Hegel, such features help to create an effect of agreement, fulfillment, and peace (Ä II, pp. 395–96). Obviously, to the extent that Hegel deems these features necessary to the communication of the spiritual content of classical art, he does not consider classical art to be indifferent to its external form. Moreover, to the extent that he derives the spiritual significance of these features from the qualities of their sensuous immediacy, he establishes a specifically symbolic connection.

Finally and perhaps most importantly, classical art may be considered symbolic in the way that art in general is symbolic—that is, with respect to what Hegel considers the truth of revealed religion and absolute philosophy. Suffering from the same limits of art in general, classical art cannot express the whole of spirit (Ä II, p. 23; Ä I, p. 111). It can express spirit as it presents itself to itself *in sensuous form*, but it cannot express spirit as it is *in itself*. It manifests spirit in its natural form, but it does not manifest spirit *per se* (Ä II, pp. 353, 365–66). In other words, classical art does not represent its content in the infinite form of thought “but rather in immediate, natural, and sensuous existence” (Ä II, pp. 18–19). It presents spirit as accurately as spirit can be presented in sensible form, but, with respect to the inner subjectivity that comes to be expressed through absolute religion and philosophy, it too turns out to be abstract (Ä II, pp. 121–22). “Classical art and its beautiful religion therefore do not satisfy the depth of spirit; as concrete as they are in themselves, they remain indeed still abstract for spirit” (Ä II, p. 24). In so far as classical art is epitomized by the plastic art of sculpture, its materiality and spatiality “let[s] the totality [of spirit] fall asunder” and prevents the appearance of spirit’s return to itself (Ä II, pp. 355–57). Spirit, in other words, remains bound to the material, and while this material element is necessary to spirit’s artistic manifestation and thus to its absolute development, it is not *sufficient* to it. Spirit must progress beyond the kind of sub-

jectivity exhibited in classical sculpture to a kind of subjectivity that can separate itself from the material and reflect back into itself (Ä II, p. 364). As classical art, spirit lacks *inner* subjectivity and fails to express the *whole* reality of spirit (Ä II, p. 107). According to Hegel, the form of classical art simply precludes this possibility. "For spirit is the infinite subjectivity of the idea which, as absolute inwardness, cannot freely form itself out of itself if the inwardness should remain poured out in the corporeality as in its corresponding existence" (Ä I, p. 111).

The reason for the transience of the classical period may therefore be interpreted as the result of the symbolic relation between the content expressed in Greek art and the more thoroughly reconciled concept of spirit presented in romantic art, revealed religion, and philosophy. According to Hegel, classical art declines because its contents, the many and various gods, are subject to *an external* fate (Ä II, pp. 84–86). A contradiction arises between the harmony with itself that each individual god expresses and the "multiplicity" that puts them at odds with each other and with fate (Ä II, p. 108). It is the destiny of the Greek gods, therefore, to proceed toward a general unity (Ä II, p. 108–109). Classical art must pass because it conceives the divine to be at the mercy of fate, instead of in full control of its own destiny. To Hegel, this contradiction reveals that a certain accidentality belonged to these gods even though sculpture could not bring it into view (Ä II, p. 108). Therefore, the polytheism of classical art gives way to the monotheism of romantic art, and the individuality presented by sculpture proves to be merely symbolic with respect to the idea of a divine-human reality (or "spirit") that creates its own necessity and truth (Ä II, p. 130). Our modern historical perspective allows us to recognize the truth hidden by the classical form precisely because our perspective requires us to interpret Greek art, as well as Greek myths, symbolically (Ä I, pp. 402–404). According to Hegel, we moderns are in the position to see that the Greeks merely *imagined* that their gods were incarnated in history: "the Greek gods had their residence (*ihren Sitz*) only in representation and imagination (*nur in der*

*Vorstellung und Phantasie*)” (Ä II, p. 115). We moderns, in other words, are in the position to see the Greek gods as representing ideas, rather than actually being in time. Consequently, our experience of Greek art is profoundly different from the Greek experience of their own art. We are bound to see the disparity between its form and the truth of spirit. We are bound to interpret Greek art symbolically.

#### IV. The Romantic Form of Art

##### A. Romantic Art as a Spiritual Advance

For Hegel romantic art represents a definite advance over classical art with respect to its concept of spirit and its capacity to exhibit subjectivity. The cause of this advance, he says, is neither a conceptual discovery nor an artistic transformation, but an *historical* occurrence. Although romantic art is not necessarily explicitly Christian, it does, in Hegel’s view, *presuppose* the coming of Christ, understood as the unique historical event in which the divine becomes human (Ä II, pp. 138–40). According to Hegel, it is the conviction that “God himself has become flesh, has been born, has lived, has suffered, died, and risen” which gives rise to the particular “religious feeling” that constitutes romantic art (Ä II, p. 111). Whereas Hegel believes the classical Greek gods to be products of the Greek aesthetic imagination, he understands the spiritual content of romantic art to have existed outside the realm of art before the romantic artist gives it an artistic form: “This is a content that art did not invent, but which was present outside of it; art did not take it out of itself, but discovered a form for it” (Ä II, p. 111). In this way Hegel contrasts classical art, whose content preexisted in religious representation and myth, with romantic art, whose content comes from concrete history. Indeed, for Hegel, this marks the difference between death and life, stone and flesh: “The classical gods received their existence only in representation and are only in stone and bronze or in intuition, but [they are] not in flesh and blood

or in actual spirit there (*da*)" (Ä II, p. 112). Moreover, according to Hegel, the experience of the historical death of God transfigures the general task of artistic consciousness. Classical artistic consciousness creates the human form to *contain the presence* of the divine, but romantic consciousness recognizes this form to be incapable of containing the whole of spirit and uses it only as *an image* of the divine (Ä I, pp. 113–14).

According to Hegel, the content that develops as a result of the experience of the divine becoming human surpasses that of classical art because it contains a greater degree of consciousness and spiritual mediation. While classical art presents the immediate unity of the spiritual and the sensible, romantic art *displays the limitation* of this merely immediate union. In other words, romantic art interrupts classical art's simple unity by including a moment of "renunciation" (*Entsagung*) within its sensuous presentation. Instead of taking "the sensible immediate existence of spirit, the corporeal, human form" as its primary content, the spirit of romantic art recognizes itself to have substance and existence beyond this immediacy (Ä I, p. 112). Thus, even when it continues to use the human form, it does not present it for its own sake but for the sake of intimating its "self-conscious innerness" (Ä I, p. 112). As a consequence, romantic art fragments classical art's perfect fusion of the sensuous and the spiritual and fails to reach the same level of beauty that classical art attains (Ä II, p. 128).

At the same time, however, in Hegel's view romantic art actually accomplishes a higher degree of spirituality than classical art. Specifically, romantic consciousness expresses a more highly developed subjectivity. In romantic art spirit points beyond the externality of the sensuous to its own inwardness, and as the result "the single subject. . . receives infinite worth" (Ä II, p. 131). Having achieved distance from the merely sensuous, spirit manages to gain a sense of itself "in itself," apart from this immediacy (Ä II, p. 128). Indeed for Hegel the negation of immediacy is the necessary condition for the development of advanced subjectivity: "On the whole, therefore, the principle of subjectivity entails the



necessity, on the one hand, of giving up the impartial union of spirit with its corporeality and positing the body as more or less negative in order to emphasize the interior over the exterior" (Ä III, p. 14). By reflecting upon its interior, spirit discovers that its truth extends beyond what the sensuous exterior can show. Spirit comes to realize that its creative activity exceeds what the sensuous can contain (Ä II, pp. 128–29). With this awareness and the resulting subjectivity, the spirit of romantic art finds a "freedom" and "blessedness" that classical art in principle could not have (Ä II, p. 115). Therefore, even though romantic art falls short of the idea of beauty portrayed by classical art, it contains all of the basic characteristics of the ideal: blessedness, independence, satisfaction, peace, and freedom. It even seems to make spirit "completely at home" for the first time (Ä II, pp. 142–43).

According to Hegel, this principle of subjectivity—spirit's turning inward—is the defining characteristic of romantic art. "The raising of spirit *to itself*, through which it attains its objectivity in itself, which it otherwise must seek in the externality and sensuousness of existence, and through which it feels and knows itself in this agreement (*Einigkeit*) with itself, constitutes the basic principle of romantic art" (Ä II, p. 128). While classical art presents the soul in complete unity with the body, romantic art shows the soul's being in itself, distinct from its immediate presence in the physical (Ä II, p. 144). In the classical ideal, the divine is limited to individuality and the soul of the gods are completely presented in bodily form; consequently, the difference between body and soul, the divine and the worldly, does not even come into view, let alone become reconciled (Ä II, p. 143). By contrast, because romantic art tolerates a greater level of differentiation within it, it achieves a more significant reconciliation. Although Greek art presents the subjective unity of the spiritual individual with itself, romantic art actually reflects a higher, more complete subjective unity: the subjective unity of the human with the divine (Ä II, p. 110; Ä III, p. 42). In other words, beyond reconciling the individual subject with the

sensuous, romantic art reconciles the individual subject with the divine, "substantial subject" (Ä III, p. 12). Whereas the immediate unity presented by classical sculpture remains opposed to spiritual reflection as such, romantic art presents the sensuous in such a way that spiritual reflection shines through and beyond it. The subjectivity of spirit contains the opposition between the sensuous and the spiritual, the finite and the infinite, but it reconciles it "through its own activity" (Ä II, p. 143).

Nonetheless, because its negative moment is essential to it, romantic art often does not exhibit this reconciliation directly. On the contrary, it reveals its limit in its tendency to present spirit in opposition to itself as well as in opposition to nature. In Hegel's terms, romantic art's substantial, objective side becomes separate from its subjective particularity (Ä III, pp. 11–12). That is to say, romantic art tends to portray divine and human subjectivity as distinct from each other. Consequently, romantic art has two different kinds of content: "the world of truth and eternity, the *divine*," which is represented as having its own subjectivity and personality, and human subjectivity, which is no longer "in immediate unity with the substantiality of spirit" (Ä III, p. 12). Otherwise stated, the spiritual content of romantic art may be expressed either in the explicitly religious vision of the divine taking on a human subjectivity or through the subjective transformation of the human secular world. In both cases romantic art has as its content subjectivity that is for itself (Ä III, p. 24). "The true content of the romantic is absolute inwardness (*Innerlichkeit*), [and] the corresponding form [is] spiritual subjectivity as the grasping (*Erfassen*) of its independence and freedom" (Ä II, pp. 129–30). Free concrete subjectivity constitutes the content of romantic art, and this content is formed so that it appeals to the spiritual interior of another concrete subjectivity. Romantic art is geared toward the interior and seeks its reconciliation there, but it enacts and expresses this reconciliation through an external form (Ä I, p. 113). "The interiority celebrates its triumph over the external and lets this victory appear in the external itself" (Ä I, p. 113).

More specifically, romantic art takes *Gemüt*—heart, feeling, soulful disposition—as its content (Ä III, p. 25). Regardless of the particular form it takes or immediate object it presents, it has subjective feeling as its fundamental content. It “brings the interior in the form of external objectivity before the intuition, but its actual content which it expresses is feeling subjectivity (*die empfindende Subjektivität*)” (Ä III, p. 25). Therefore, in the case of religious art, it is not sufficient that the religious figures be portrayed in the human form. Rather, it is imperative that their subjective feelings be conveyed through this form. In Hegel’s view, Christian painting accomplishes such expressivity especially well (Ä III, pp. 21–22). He observes, for example, a great difference between the Egyptian bas-relief of Isis holding Horus on her knees and Christian representations of the Madonna and child: “The Egyptian Isis . . . has nothing motherly, no tenderness, no feature of soul and feeling, which even the stiffer Byzantine Madonna images did not lack completely” (Ä III, p. 21). However, according to Hegel, everything that is part of human experience can be used in romantic art so long as it indicates this basic content of subjective interiority: “any and everything can attain a place here” (*alles und jedes kann hier Platz gewinnen*) (Ä III, p. 25). Particular objects, depictions of all sorts of everyday things, and even landscapes may become the object of romantic art so long as they are formed by the subjectivity, feeling, and disposition of the artist. As Hegel emphasizes, the real content is always the “life and soul of the subjective interpretation and execution” (Ä III, p. 26). Whereas the classical artist puts him or herself into the *formation* of the artistic content, the romantic artist quite literally has him- or herself as the artistic *content*. The artist’s particular experience as a human subjectivity becomes the actual *subject* of the work (in both senses of this word). Consequently, as Hegel claims, the romantic artist is “really self-determining” (Ä II, p. 238).

This self-determination of the individual coincides with the subject’s reconciliation with divine subjectivity, and it is this reconciliation that constitutes the perfect content for

romantic art. As Hegel remarks, the ideal content of romantic painting is "the *reconciliation* (*Versöhnung*) of subjective feeling and disposition (*Gemütes*) with God, who in his human appearance himself underwent this way of pain" (*Ä III*, p. 41). For Hegel, human subjectivity can reach its completion only by uniting with divine subjectivity. "The soul wants *itself*, but it wants itself in an other, as it is in its particularity; it gives itself therefore up to God in order to find and enjoy itself in him" (*Ä III*, pp. 41–42). Thus, from the point of view of the human subject, the content of romantic art is the human knowledge of having God immediately within (*Ä II*, p. 132). By the same token, for Hegel, divine subjectivity can come to be concretely real only through human subjectivity; the being of one subjective consciousness with *an other* brings infinite subjectivity, the absolute, into existence (*Ä II*, p. 155). Romantic art illustrates this reconciliation by drawing its content from the everyday human world (*Ä II*, p. 145). "The reconciliation of spirit . . . is brought to intuition and certainty through the appearance of God in the world" (*Ä II*, p. 147).

The content of romantic art therefore extends beyond the arbitrary level of subjective feeling to the spiritual act of reconciliation. More specifically, it culminates in *love*—"spiritual beauty as such" (*Ä II*, p. 156). According to Hegel, love contains the basic determinations of absolute spirit: "The true essence of love consists in giving up one's consciousness, forgetting oneself in another self, and indeed in this letting go and forgetting first to have and possess oneself. This mediation of spirit with itself and fulfillment of itself in its totality is the absolute" (*Ä II*, p. 155). Love is the absoluteness of spirit, "the reconciled return out of its other to itself" (*Ä II*, p. 155). In love the finite subject opens itself up to the infinity of subjective relation, losing and finding itself in its other (*Ä II*, p. 183). According to Hegel, romantic art is capable of expressing this dialectic because it includes a negative moment within it. In romantic art subjectivity "steps out of itself into relation with an other," and it finds the deeper truth of itself in this other (*Ä II*, p. 146). In Hegelian language, this means that the content

of romantic art does not have its external form “for itself,” but “for another” (Ä II, p. 145). The intrinsic otherness of romantic art’s form is reflected by the fact that it requires an act of mediation on the part of the viewer (Ä II, p. 135). By entering into the spiritual and emotional content of romantic art, the finite subjective viewer recognizes him- or herself in an other, extends beyond finite to infinite subjectivity, and completes the artwork all at the same time (Ä II, pp. 156, 183). By expressing the interior unity between or among individual spirits, romantic art leads the finite subject beyond itself. This openness to its negative and to infinite subjectivity represents to Hegel an advance over Greek art, which portrayed its gods as self-sufficient and closed in upon themselves. By reconciling spirit with itself, the divine with the human, and God with the world, romantic art makes what Hegel calls “absolute subjectivity” present and existent.

According to Hegel, the arts of painting and music best coincide with the principle of subjectivity that governs romantic art. In particular he notes that the depth of feeling and subjective interiority of the romantics coincides most closely with the principle of painting. The reason for this, according to Hegel, is that painting expresses the inner *as inner* (Ä III, pp. 20–23). Instead of filling three-dimensional space like sculpture and architecture do, painting involves only two external dimensions (Ä III, pp. 26–27). As a result, it draws attention away from the physical space of bodily movement to the internal space of the imagination and of spirit (Ä III, p. 16). Through this change, Hegel says, painting is able to present “the shining forth” of spirit rather than the unity of spirit and the sensible presented by classical art (Ä III, p. 15). Painting puts figures into an illusionary space that mirrors the interior subjectivity of the figures (Ä III, p. 18). Whereas the spirit of sculpture presents itself as an object external to the viewer, the illusionary space of painting allows the subjectivity that inspired the painting to “step over” (*herübertritt*) into the community that views it (Ä III, p. 17). “In painting . . . the divine itself appears in itself as the spiritual, living subject which steps

over into the community (*Gemeinde*) and gives every individual the possibility to put himself in spiritual community (*Gemeinschaft*) and mediation with it" (*Ä III*, p. 17). In other words, in the painting of romantic art, the subjectivity with which the painting is imbued by the artist merges with the subjectivity of the viewer. Each completes itself in the other, and each opens the other up to the higher unity of intersubjectivity, the spiritual reality of infinite subjectivity.

### *B. Symbolic Elements of Romantic Art*

As we have seen, romantic art attains a higher spiritual ideal than classical art at the expense of reintroducing an incongruity between its content and form (*Ä I*, p. 392). The spiritual content develops such that it can no longer completely harmonize with its sensuous expression. At this level, as Taylor observes, "Art again becomes symbolic, in the sense that it is once again not adequate to the Idea."<sup>22</sup> Form and content are once again related symbolically (*VPK* 1823, p. 189), but in distinction from the specifically symbolic form of art, which struggled toward an adequate expression of a concept it held in a rather indeterminate fashion, the romantic form determinately and concretely reflects the limitation of its form even while it continues to express its spiritual content. Hegel clarifies the relation between the symbolic and romantic art forms by noting that romantic art reintroduces "from the opposed side" (*von der entgegengesetzten Seite*) the separation of content and form that characterized symbolic art (*Ä I*, p. 392). While symbolic art strives (*sucht*) for the unity of form and content, romantic art reaches beyond (*überschreitet*) it (*Ä I*, p. 392). In other words, the content of romantic art outstrips its form; it exceeds the capacity of the sensuous form to contain and express it. Therefore, instead of presenting itself in perfect harmony with its form as it did in classical art, spirit presents itself as opposing the sensuous even while it partially inheres in it. No longer simply and immediately at rest with the sensuous, spirit "dissolves every classical union of inwardness and external appearance and flees out of the

latter back into itself" (Ä I, p. 392). More specifically, spirit displays itself in the sensuous *as returning to itself* out of the sensuous (Ä III, p. 27). "The simple, pure totality of the ideal dissolves and disintegrates into the doubled totality of subjectivity existing in itself and the external appearance in order to let spirit attain through this separation the deeper reconciliation in its own element of the interior" (Ä II, p. 128). Breaking down the identity of content and form, the spiritual content distinguishes itself from its external form and "withdraws back into the infinity of the interior" (Ä II, p. 117). As Hegel explains, by this point subjectivity can no longer "go together with its corporeality in an undivided unity" (Ä III, p. 11). Having experienced itself as distinct from this immediacy, it can never again achieve a straightforward identification with it. Seeing itself as in some sense "above" nature, spirit can no longer find its completely adequate expression "in" it.

Nonetheless, as Hegel emphasizes, the content of romantic art *requires* an external form. It can only present itself as "beyond" the sensuous *through* the sensuous. In order to suggest the internal reality of itself, romantic subjectivity must appear *as coming out of the externality of the artwork* and returning to itself (Ä III, pp. 27, 15). The unity of content and form in romantic art therefore is not completely broken but loosely maintained. Spirit can show itself to be other than the sensuous only through a degree of identification with it. Through the specificity of its external qualities, the romantic art form reveals its spiritual interior and makes it "visible" (*sichtbar*) (Ä III, p. 14). In this sense, while romantic art is certainly to be distinguished from the symbolic art form, it does function as a symbol in Hegel's general definition of the word: romantic art contains an expression that indicates an "other" content through an identity with that content. By creating "a free room for play" (*einen freien Spielraum*) between the sensible and the spiritual, romantic art establishes a difference between the two sides and thus grants them independence with respect to one another (Ä III, pp. 13–14). Therefore, as is the case with the expression and the meaning of the symbol, the form and

content of romantic art are to a certain degree opposed to each other. As Hegel affirms, the externality of the artwork has its concept and meaning not in itself but in something else, namely in the feeling and disposition of the artist (Ä I, p. 113). However, despite this difference between form and content, the artwork manages to express a particular subjective content because its immediacy contains some kind of identity with it. Like the symbol, it communicates its meaning through its distinctive qualities. Such symbolic identification may be observed with regard to the colors in a painting. According to Hegel, they do not function primarily for their own sake. Rather, they work to create an effect that refers the viewer to the interiority and subjectivity of spirit (Ä III, pp. 22–23). A painter, for example, uses gray colors to express a gray mood and bright ones to express a bright mood. Similarly, romantic art uses particular forms and images in order to express something beyond what the forms themselves immediately are. For example, the human form is used to express divinity, and images of maternity are used to express love. In contrast to some more recent art, the colors and forms of romantic art do not simply present color or form *per se*; rather, they work to express something other than what they immediately are.

Furthermore, as is the case with symbolic art and with the symbol in general, the rift between form and content implies the inclusion of some qualities, aspects, or traits that do not pertain to the intended meaning. In other words, romantic art reincorporates the particularity and accidentality that classical art excluded (Ä II, p. 150). According to Hegel, to the extent that romantic art stresses the unique individuality of Christ as the human incarnation of the divine (over and against the general reconciliation of the human and the divine), it affirms the presentation of that which resists generalization. “What the free concept of the beautiful had removed from itself as inappropriate, the not-ideal, here is . . . necessarily assimilated and brought to intuition” (Ä II, p. 150). Like the symbol, romantic art functions halfway between natural particularity and spiritually clarified meaning.



Romantic art, however, does contain one important characteristic that distinguishes it from the symbol in general: it tends toward an *indifference* between form and content. Because romantic art has spirit “in itself” as its content and because it displays the limitation of spirit’s appearance in sensuous form, its content tends toward an indifference to its form. The act of reconciliation and the beauty of romantic art occurs within inner subjectivity itself, and the external form decreases in importance. The truth of the Christian story of the death and resurrection serves as the basis of romantic art to such an extent that the form of art becomes somewhat extraneous (Ä II, p. 149). The spiritual content becomes relatively indifferent to its form (Ä I, pp. 113–14, 392; Ä II, pp. 138–40). Hegel clarifies the point: “For subjectivity, although it penetrates the externality as the objectivity belonging to it, is at the same time however an identity returning back into itself out of the objective, which, through this determination (*Beschlossenheit*) in itself becomes indifferent (*gleichgültig*) to the externality and lets it go free (*dasselbe frei lässt*)” (Ä III, p. 24; Ä I, pp. 112–13). The romantic artist simply takes the content he or she immediately finds and presents it “according to discretion” (Ä II, p. 144). Spirit confirms its inner value regardless of its external form and the specificity of its content (Ä II, p. 136). Moreover, by positing these as the negative of its interior reality and therefore as accidental to itself, spirit further induces its move away from them (Ä II, p. 136). The more spirit seeks a pure reflection in itself, the more it disregards the specificity of its form. “This in-itself infinite and in and for itself general is absolute negativity of all particularity, simple unity with self” (Ä II, pp. 129–30). For this reason, Hegel describes romantic art as the art form in which art transcends itself. It is, he says, “art’s overstepping of itself” (*das Hinausgehen der Kunst über sich selbst*) within its own field and form (Ä I, p. 113).

However, as Hegel himself notes, romantic art expresses neither a complete indifference to form nor a total disregard for the particularity of its content. First of all, as Hegel insists, the religious romantic consciousness *requires*

art. The reconciliation of the divine and the human cannot be completed without this sensuous presentation. The divine must present itself, must appear in nature; otherwise it cannot unite with the human and complete itself (*Ä II*, p. 149).

In this respect art supplies the intuiting consciousness for the appearance of God the special presence (*Gegenwart*) of a single real form (*Gestalt*), a concrete image also of the external characteristics of the events in which Christ's birth, his life and suffering, death, resurrection . . . extend themselves so that in art alone the transient real appearance of God repeats itself in an ever renewed duration. (*Ä II*, p. 150)

Without art the event that founds religious romantic consciousness would lose its concreteness and fall irretrievably into the historical past. Art prevents this from happening by re-creating the original content of romantic consciousness.

Moreover, to a great extent, romantic art *does* require specific external content. Like the symbol, its meaning is communicated through the similarity between its external sensuousness and its spiritual meaning. Particularly within the realm of romantic art Hegel calls "the religious circle," certain images are necessary to express divine subjectivity. The external content of romantic art must tell the story of the life, death, and resurrection of the divine in human form; it must present the story of Christ, his mother, his disciples, and all those who are affected by the Holy Spirit (*Ä II*, pp. 132–33; *Ä II*, pp. 157–59). Similarly, the love which romantic art expresses must be of a certain kind: it must be a love of satisfaction, without desire or demand (*Ä II*, p. 157; *Ä III*, p. 45). For Hegel this kind of love is epitomized by the holy family, especially the love of the mother for her son (*Ä III*, p. 45). This is a love "without passion and longing, without further need, without any other goal except to have and to hold what she has" (*Ä III*, p. 52). Accordingly, Hegel deems the love of Mary for Jesus "the most beautiful content" of romantic art (*Ä III*, p. 51). For Hegel, the love of the mother for her child epitomizes the

romantic ideal of love because it enacts the movement of absolute subjectivity: the mother sacrifices herself for the other and yet has the greatest satisfaction of self in this other (*Ä II*, pp. 157–58). In all these respects Hegel is quite specific in stipulating the external content for this kind of romantic art.

In this religious circle, it is also essential that the divine appear in human form, and it must do so in a way that surpasses the “sightless” human form of the Greeks and makes the divine appear fully subjective: “The God of romantic art, however, appears seeing, self-knowing, inwardly subjective” (*Ä II*, p. 132). One important way the artist conveys this subjectivity is through facial gestures, which Hegel explicitly calls symbolic (*ENZ III*, §401). But even as a whole, the human form in romantic art becomes a symbol of the unity of the divine and the human. The romantic artist uses the human form to express a kind of subjectivity that transcends the immediacy of human individuality: the human form reveals the return of spirit to itself, the spiritual consciousness of the divine in the human and the human in the divine (*Ä II*, p. 131). In Hegel’s view, this transference from the human form to a more-than-immediate spirit follows naturally from Christian romantic consciousness’s experience of the divine within it. As Hegel explains, for the Christian the *immediate existence* of Christ is not the whole reality of spirit; spirit is immanent in, but not limited to, this single historical figure (*Ä II*, pp. 133, 159). “The immediate existence of Christ as this single human who is God is posited as superseded. . . . The true reality of God is not the immediate existence but spirit” (*Ä II*, p. 159). Christian romantic consciousness thus lends itself easily to romantic art, which uses the human form to symbolize the infinite subjectivity of spirit.

Hegel specifies the nature of the content even further when he suggests the appropriateness of worship, confession, conversion, and prayer for the romantic art form. These acts serve particularly well as symbols for the infinite subjectivity of spirit because they represent ways in which subjective human consciousness identifies with the

divine—that is, ways in which spirit brings itself into being (Ä III, p. 54). According to Hegel, in order to insure that the content refers to a “real and present” (*wirklich und gegenwärtig*) world (and not to a fulfillment in a world “beyond” this one), in addition to its presentation of the story of Christ, romantic art of the religious type must also exhibit normal human beings undergoing the same process of suffering, and renewal (Ä III, p. 45). Unlike classical art, which represents pain and suffering only as the result of something arbitrary, romantic art gives pain, suffering, and death meaning (Ä II, p. 134). For Hegel, the inclusion of these negative moments enhances the power of spirit. The greater the reconciled opposition between form and content, the deeper the spirit (Ä II, p. 152). Here again it is a question of presenting spirit in the form most appropriate to corresponding spiritual meaning. It is a question of *symbolizing* the power of spirit.

As the human form is used to express divine subjectivity, natural forms are also used to suggest subjective human moods and meanings that they do not immediately contain. But romantic painting does not imitate nature; rather it seeks to correspond with something outside of it. It tries to show “the agreement (*Übereinstimmung*) of the portrayed thing *with itself*,” that is, with its spiritual concept. Otherwise stated, it tries to show the meaning of what it portrays for subjective spiritual reality (Ä III, pp. 60–63). By going into the most thorough detail in depicting nature, the artist does not present the immediate singularity of natural objects, but rather its more general effect on the imagination (Ä III, p. 66). Although the form in which the content of romantic art is presented is “to a certain degree indifferent” (Ä II, p. 151), this kind of romantic art also expresses its meaning, like the symbol, through an identity with the sensuous. “For disposition, heart, feeling, however spiritual and interior they also remain, always maintain a connection with the sensuous and the corporal such that . . . through the corporeality itself, through glance, facial traits . . . they are capable of communicating the innermost life and existence of spirit” (Ä II,

p. 156). So long as spirit remains within the domain of art, some correspondence between form and content is necessary (Ä II, p. 145). Hegel emphasizes this point especially with regard to painting. Not only must painting give the inner content its *appropriate* outer expression, but it must also express the *particularity* of the subjectivity that serves as its interior content and spiritual meaning (Ä III, pp. 56, 62). In other words, the form must correspond to a particular subjectivity. In contrast to classical sculpture, which presented the particular as a general type, romantic painting cannot represent subjectivity *per se* without identifying and portraying a *particular* subjectivity. Romantic consciousness cannot “purify itself” of particularity and accidental details because it requires these particularities in order to correspond to the *general* notion of subjectivity (Ä II, p. 145).

Due to its emphasis on subjectivity, romantic art’s potential material becomes infinite once it steps out of the explicitly religious sphere. As Hegel defines it, romantic art that does not deal with the story of Christ does not presuppose its content: “It stands open, totally free, materialless, purely creative and productive” (Ä II, p. 174). Nature in itself is no longer conceived as divine or seen to constitute the absolute, and the spirituality of the classical world is reduced to only one aspect of the absolute (Ä II, p. 137). Consequently, all natural objects and scenery, human events, tools, situations, and so on are set free for art so long as they are used to express inner subjectivity. Everything that is human or related to human subjectivity may serve as the content of art (Ä II, p. 138). However, despite this relative indifference to its material, romantic art’s portrayal of the finite world of everydayness is symbolic in a very significant sense: it uses these objects and scenes from everyday life *in order to indicate something else*. Romantic art uses this external, immediate material in order to express what lies beyond it—namely “the beauty of the soul, the height of innerness, the holiness of feeling” (Ä II, p. 146). It is true that in romantic art, the otherwise mundane and accidental gains importance: “it is the inwardness in the immediate present, in the everyday environment, in the most usual and small, which becomes the content” (Ä III, p. 62). But

this importance lies not in the immediacy of these trivial things, but in the spirituality to which they point through their specific particularity; their significance lies in the larger, more complete and determinate reality that they evoke. As Hegel explains, what makes them of interest is “the *liveliness* and joy of independent existence in general” (Ä III, p. 62). In other words, their interest lies not in what they simply are, but in what art *shows them to be* beyond their mere immediacy—that is, in their symbolic meaning. Romantic artists concern themselves not with the merely sensuous, but with an interior reality that is not immediately given (Ä III, p. 114). By forming the various bits and pieces of immediacy into artistic units, these artists can present the harmony and completion of spiritual individualities (Ä III, p. 62). In the presentation (*Darstellung*) of such living reality, art completely changes our standpoint with respect to it (Ä III, p. 64). More than the other forms of art, romantic art shows what normal day-to-day living obscures. It fixes the fleeting impressions of immediacy and transforms them into objects mediated by subjectivity, content that has spiritual meaning (Ä III, p. 65). When we look at romantic art, “We believe ourselves to see something completely different and new (*ganz Anderes und neu*)” because in daily living we do not get the chance to observe the situation in the same way, with such detail, subjective feeling, love, and soul. The artist, so to speak, “breathes new life” into the immediate thing or situation (Ä III, pp. 66–67). Here Hegel notes the painting of the Italian masters in particular. Even though they remain completely tied to earth, they present something *other*: what they create are “images of an *other* sun, an *other* spring” (Ä III, p. 114, my emphasis). When romantic art depicts roses, for example, it does not simply depict roses as we find them present among us, but “roses that bloom at the same time in heaven” (Ä III, p. 114). Even when romantic art’s content is the material of everyday living, it uses this content to symbolize the infinite power of spirit.

In all of these ways, whether its content comes from the religious sphere or the sphere of the everyday, romantic art is highly symbolic. It presents sensuous immediacy in such

a way as to express spirit's infinite subjectivity. Indeed, it is precisely in and through this symbolization that romantic art constitutes art's spiritual apogee.

## **V. The "End" of Art?**

### *A. Art's Dissolution*

According to Hegel romantic art contains within it the principle of art's dissolution. In its final stages art begins to express the necessity of a form higher than its own (*Ä II*, p. 142). In romantic art spirit gradually withdraws into its interior subjectivity to such an extent that the particularity of its sensuous exterior becomes relatively inessential to its meaning (*Ä II*, pp. 220–21). By holding its form and content only "loosely" together, romantic art propagates an indifference between the two and highlights art's ultimately limited ability to fuse them. The more spirit turns in toward itself and recognizes itself to be "in itself," apart from its sensuous presentation, the more it experiences the inessentiality of its particular external form. And the more it experiences this inessentiality, the more it withdraws into its interior. Eventually, the inner and outer sides of art break apart, and form and content become wholly indifferent to each other (*Ä II*, p. 222). Spiritual content can no longer harmonize with its artistic form and, as Hegel says, art undergoes a kind of "dissolution" (*Auflösung*) or "disintegration" (*Zerfallen*) (*Ä II*, pp. 220–22). Historically speaking, this development refers to the fact that art, once "the great teacher of humanity," can no longer convey the highest truth of spirit. Art can only convey the level of truth that lends itself to a sensuous presentation and, for this reason, it is the best way to convey the truth of the Greek gods (*Ä I*, p. 23). But Hegel claims that "in contrast to this there is a deeper comprehension of the truth in which the truth is not so closely related and congenial to the sensuous that it can be taken up and expressed by this material in an appropriate way" (*Ä I*, pp. 23–24). Beyond the spiritual truths realized by the Greeks in and through their sensuous presentations, and even beyond romantic art's expression of spiritual subjectivity, Hegel asserts the truth of

"pure spirituality" (Ä I, p. 102). According to Hegel, once spirit experiences this internally based truth, it no longer experiences its external sensuous form as providing the best means to its self-expression. Art therefore ceases to be the primary means through which people experience the divine; it ceases to fulfill humanity's greatest spiritual needs (Ä I, p. 142). Hegel announces, "For us art is no longer the highest way in which the truth provides itself existence (*Uns gilt die Kunst nicht mehr als die höchste Weise, in welcher die Wahrheit sich Existenz verschafft*)" (Ä I, p. 141). During the "fine times" of the Greeks and of the late middle ages, art presented the absolute truth or "what consciousness valued as the absolute truth (*was dem Bewusstsein als das Absolute galt*)" (Ä II, p. 237). However, as "moderns," we realize that art conveys only a certain level and kind of truth. Our cultural training has taught us to look beyond the specificity of the work of art to the general rules of thought that the art work intimates (Ä I, pp. 24–25). Consequently, instead of having religious or spiritual experiences through our works of art, we tend to reflect upon them and to judge them (Ä I, pp. 25–26). We may still appreciate art in some emotional way, but we can no longer have the highest kind of spiritual experience through it. As Hegel puts it, "we no longer bend our knee" before any work of art (Ä I, p. 142). "We are beyond honoring works of art as divine and being able to pray to them. . . . Thought and reflection have outstripped (*überflügelt*) fine art" (Ä I, p. 24). Instead of experiencing art in an immediate way, we moderns tend to think about it (VPK 1823, p. 6). Yet, for Hegel the fact that art ceases to be the most effective mediation of the truth is no misfortune, but "the effect and progress of art itself" (Ä II, p. 234). It is simply the logical consequence and natural extension of art's concept. "Neither according to form nor according to its content is art the highest and absolute way for spirit to bring its true interests to consciousness. For, precisely on account of its form, art is restricted to a certain content" (Ä I, p. 23; see also VPK 1823, p. 5). Due to the limitations of its form, art cannot express its content immanently (ENZ III, §371). Hegel thus suggests that art reaches its limit conceptually as well as historically.



In light of these passages many scholars have understood Hegel as proclaiming the “end” of art. For example, in the 50’s, 60’s, and 70’s a number of German commentators such as Bubner,<sup>23</sup> Glockner,<sup>24</sup> Harries,<sup>25</sup> Henrich,<sup>26</sup> Litt,<sup>27</sup> Kuhn,<sup>28</sup> Oelmüller,<sup>29</sup> and Wollandt<sup>30</sup> aroused scholarly interest in Hegel’s aesthetics by interpreting Hegel’s pronouncement of art’s dissolution to mean its end, its death, or its displacement. Although most of these commentators objected to the idea that art has come to end, they nevertheless understood this to be Hegel’s basic claim. Indeed as Stephen Bungay and Annemarie Gethmann-Siefert each have shown, Hegel’s ambiguous assertion regarding art’s dissolution has spurred a wide range of interpretations. Gethmann-Siefert suggests that the various approaches to this theme tend to fall into one of two categories: either they show how Hegel himself contradicts this claim, or they try to show how Hegel’s aesthetics may be salvaged despite this claim.<sup>31</sup> Bungay provides a similar kind of survey, dividing commentators on this theme into three groups: “Those who think [Hegel] was wrong; those who think he was only partly wrong, or that his system can be saved despite itself; and those who think he had an important insight, not about the end of art, but about its future.”<sup>32</sup> Although Gethmann-Siefert and Bungay each have argued quite convincingly against the notion that Hegel intended to assert art’s end, this interpretation persists even in more recent accounts of Hegel’s aesthetics. For example, Andreas Grossmann continues the tradition of interpreting Hegel as asserting art’s end by emphasizing that for Hegel art is lacking with respect to philosophy’s presentation of the truth,<sup>33</sup> and by concurring with Walter Jaeschke’s claim that Hegel’s philosophy is a “theory of the end of art as well as the end of religion.”<sup>34</sup> Along the same lines, Klaus Hast maintains that Hegel sees art as coming to an end with romantic irony.<sup>35</sup>

### *B. Art’s (Symbolic) Absoluteness*

To be sure, Hegel *does* mean to indicate a certain limitation of art with respect to philosophy. But he does *not* see art as having come to its demise.<sup>36</sup> As Stephen Bungay points

out, despite the deluge of articles and heated debate over the meaning of Hegel's "end of art" thesis, this phrase does not appear a single time in Hegel's lectures.<sup>37</sup> Nor does Hegel suggest that philosophy displaces or replaces art's sensuous presentation. On the contrary, Hegel clearly holds that philosophy *needs* art in order to raise itself beyond the abstractions of the understanding. He claims, for example, "When the understanding comes back out again from these abstractions to raise itself to reason, the need for something concrete, and also for art enters at the same time" (*Ä II*, p. 114). Philosophy does not simply subsume the task of art. Rather, as William Desmond argues, "art and *absoluteness* belong together" in such a way that philosophy must remain open to a "dialectic interplay" with art.<sup>38</sup> Bungay also insists that the role of art for Hegel is autonomous and irreducible: "It is through art and only through art, that Truth is revealed in a sensuous form."<sup>39</sup> Art performs a mediating function that revealed religion and absolute philosophy cannot perform. Even though the modern worldview requires that the truth of art be complemented by that of religion and philosophy, the particular form of art remains indispensable: "For the human being cannot hold out (*aushalten*) in the interior as such, in pure thought, in the world of laws and their generality; one also needs [the world] of sensuous existence, feelings, the heart (*Gemüt*), and the like" (*Ä I*, p. 135). Stephen Houlgate concurs, emphasizing that for Hegel art is simply no longer the *highest* expression of the truth: "Like philosophy, art expresses the truth which lies in the dissolution of opposites and in the emergence of unity and reconciliation. But art does not express this truth in its clearest and most determinate form. Art is not the logical articulation of the idea of unity as an *idea*; it is, rather, the mere *appearance* of the truth."<sup>40</sup>

Far from signifying the demise of art, then, Hegel's claim that art undergoes a kind of dissolution merely signifies art's intrinsic connection to religion and philosophy. In other words, it underlines the fact that art gains its meaning in and through its cultural context. In the culture of the Greeks and of the late middle ages, art was related to religion in such a way that the distinction between its form

and its content did not come into view. Those who viewed classical sculpture fell to their knees before the spirit they perceived as perfectly present in material form. Through history, however, this ideal unity of form and content “dissolves” because the viewers of art become conscious of the distinction between form and content. Now aware of the way in which spirit transcends sensuousness, we moderns cannot fail to see that art mediates spirit in a less than perfect way. We can no longer accept that the art work makes spirit immediately present. As a result of our religious consciousness and philosophical perspective, we no longer take art at its face value; rather we ask about its meaning. Unable to gain satisfaction from art simply by intuiting it, we are led to combine our sensual and emotional experience with intellectual reflection and judgment. We can no longer experience art as *being* its meaning, but can only understand it as expressing a meaning. Moreover, though we expect that the art work identifies its meaning through the characteristics of its qualities (rather than through an arbitrary external attribution), we nonetheless remain conscious of the limitation of this identification. In other words, we experience art *as a symbol* of a meaning it does not fully contain. Thus, not only will the modern artist be inclined to return to symbolic forms of art, as Houlgate suggests,<sup>41</sup> but the modern viewer will be inclined to see even classical art as symbolic. We moderns cannot believe that Zeus actually exists in his sculptured form, but we can see how this form serves *to represent* this divinity. Ultimately, then, the “dissolution” of art’s ideal refers to the fact that the modern artist and spectator cannot create and experience art without thinking about its meaning (as distinct from its immediate presence in sensuous form). Broadly speaking, it suggests that whether or not the perfect unity of form and content can be created and experienced depends upon the historical context of the subjects involved. That is to say, whether or not a given artwork is perceived symbolically depends upon the cultural context, religious commitments, and philosophical tendencies of the artist and viewers.

Nonetheless, though art is inherently connected to religion and philosophy and thus limited “in itself,” it still constitutes an essential part of absolute spirit. Like religion and philosophy, art gives spirit the opportunity to rise above its empty immediacy and have itself as its own object. Indeed, art also grants spirit the singular experience of knowing itself in the form of sensible intuition; it grants spirit the occasion to experience itself in a radically ‘other’ form. Without this knowledge of what it means to be in this way, spirit would be incomplete and finite; there would be something spirit did not know, something that limited its power of determination. In religious and philosophical reflection, spirit knows itself as other more clearly and directly, but in art spirit *feels* and *intuits* itself as other and this experience is absolutely necessary to its sense of completeness. If spirit could not see and feel itself in nature and in sensuous form, it would be limited (by nature and the sensuous) and therefore less than absolute. Spirit has an absolute need for art because only art allows it to be at home in the sensuous. Only art allows spirit to externalize itself so completely in its ‘other.’

But the being-self-in-other conditioned by art is even more radical than this. To the extent that art is symbolic—and it is necessarily so from the point of view of revealed religion and absolute philosophy—spirit’s self-presentation in art grants it the occasion to experience itself as *internally* other. Through its symbolic embodiment in natural material, spirit becomes *conscious* of itself as *lacking* in consciousness. Through the discrepancy between its form and content, spirit experiences itself as self-alienated and as limited in its very capacity to be self-determining. Accordingly, spirit must manifest itself in sensuous form precisely because “the manifestation of the truth in sensuous form is not truly appropriate to spirit (*dem Geiste nicht wahrhaft angemessen sei*)” (Ä I, p. 144). *Spirit needs the experience of the symbol’s difference between form and content* because spirit’s power lies in its ability to abide in such negativity (PG, pp. 36, 18). Through its symbolic presentation in art, spirit discovers itself in the sensuous, gives this immediacy

meaning, and thus exercises the power of alterity that *makes it* spirit. The absoluteness of art consists, therefore, less in spirit's overcoming of the symbolic, than in spirit's endurance of its struggle and striving. Spirit's symbolic self-presentation in art allows spirit to identify the immediate and mediating aspects of itself and thus make itself absolute: to be both that which it is in its immediacy and something other than this, both mediated and mediating.

Hegel's explicit consideration of art as absolute, his attribution of symbolic elements to this absolute form, and his implicit understanding of art as generally symbolic all attest to his recognition of the importance of spirit's being in sensuous form. Unfortunately, critics such as Derrida who have emphasized the way Hegel's notion of spirit supersedes the sensuous have overlooked this basic tenet of Hegel's philosophy: art's presentation of spirit in sensuous form belongs to spirit's *absolute* self-determination. Although the sign certainly plays an essential role in the determination of thought, *spirit's* full self-determination requires the sensuous mediation of the *symbolic* in art.

## Chapter Four



### Spirit's Symbolic Self-Representation in Religion<sup>1</sup>

Hegel's lectures on the philosophy of religion identify symbolic representation (*Vorstellung*) as the foundation of religious formation and devotion (*VPR I-m*, pp. 235, pp. 292–93). This representation involves both sensible images and conceptual metaphors and so entails an ambiguity of meaning which ultimately must be subjected to thought. Placed midway between art and philosophy, religion's representations go beyond the immediate form of art, but they do not quite reach the self-clarifying form of thought employed by philosophy.

As a form of absolute spirit, religion serves the same basic purpose that art and philosophy serve: it enables spirit to come to know itself, to create itself, to come to be the self-knowing act it is. By Hegel's technical definition, religion refers to "the Idea of spirit which relates itself to itself"; it is "*the self-consciousness of absolute spirit*" (***das Selbstbewusstsein des absoluten Geistes***) (*VPR I-m*, p. 222). In religious terms, it is "the self-consciousness of God" (*VPR III-m*, p. 99)—God coming to realization in and through the "other" of humanity and humanity reaching its fulfillment in and through the divine. In contrast to art, which lets spirit present itself to itself in an immediate way, religion facilitates spirit's encounter with itself *as spirit*: it allows spirit to conceive itself as self-reflecting and self-knowing. Art presents spirit in a finite, immediate form, but religion represents *the movement* from the finite to the infi-

nite: it *conceives the transition* from the finite world to the infinite realm of absolute spirit (VPR I-m, p. 308). Artistic consciousness alters an external object in order to invest it with a meaning beyond its immediate existence, and through this attribution it reconciles the spiritual and the sensuous in the form of a sensuous immediacy. Religion also accomplishes the reconciliation of spirit, but it does so with greater depth. By including a moment of detachment from the sensuous through the practice of devotion and worship, religious consciousness discovers this reconciliation of the spiritual and the sensuous to take place *within the spiritual*. Whereas art takes the immediacy of stone, bronze, colors, or tones and transforms it into something with meaning for the consciousness that creates or observes it, religion conceives and represents its content *as* self-conscious. In art spirit may find itself in the immediate form of a statue of Apollo, for example, but in religion spirit identifies itself as the subjective person of Apollo. In art spirit discovers itself in the form of another sensuous immediacy, but in religion spirit discovers itself in an other self-consciousness. Thus, for Hegel, religion involves a greater degree of consciousness on the part of spirit, and it allows spirit to recognize a greater identity between itself and its "other."<sup>2</sup>

If religion is superior to art in this sense, it is also inferior to philosophy. According to Hegel, religious representations must be thought through by philosophy if they are to attain their ultimate meaning. Religion *portrays* the content of spirit, but it does not *demonstrate the truth* of this content. Its dependency upon representation limits its ability to express truth in its wholeness. Although it captures the truth in various symbolic images and conceptions, it does not explicate the necessary relations of these representations. Hegel thus insists that religion is ultimately dependent upon philosophy, and this insistence seems to suggest that he understands philosophical thought to make religion and religious representation obsolete. Nonetheless, Hegel insists that religion is a form of *absolute* spirit. A problem seems to arise: how can religion be both absolute and dependent upon philosophy at the same time? But this

is a problem only if one interprets "spirit" as essentially and exclusively *thought*. Yet, as we have already begun to see, spirit is *not* reducible to thought. Although philosophical thought can explicate the truth of spirit with a clarity that exceeds that of religious representation, only religion can portray it with the intensity of emotion suitable to real human subjectivity. And since human subjectivity is essential to the constitution of spirit, religion proves to be absolutely necessary to spirit's integrity, to its concretion, and to its truth.

Moreover, as this chapter will demonstrate, symbolic representation is essential to the very absoluteness of religion. At first glance, of course, this claim seems to contradict Hegel's intention, for Hegel distinguishes absolute religion from finite religion precisely because he sees the former as including a moment of thought. In his view, the representations of absolute religion correspond with the logic of the Idea and are therefore most amenable to dialectical truth. Accordingly, while finite religious consciousness remains embedded in the symbolic, absolute religion acknowledges the limits of the symbolic and thus overcomes them, even while it continues to use symbolic representations. Therefore, commentators such as Quentin Lauer are correct to note that an element of thought is essential to religion's absoluteness.<sup>3</sup> However, as we shall see, Lauer is wrong to suggest that the element of thought that Hegel sees as belonging to absolute religion alone constitutes religion's absoluteness. For in so far as absolute religion is aligned with thought, it runs the risk of being appropriated by philosophy and losing its status as independently absolute. Yet Hegel is as insistent about religion's unique absolute status as he is about its essential association with representation (*VPR I-m*, pp. 234–35). Cyril O'Regan's account of Hegel's understanding of the relationship between religion and philosophy thus comes closer to Hegel's actual view because it acknowledges that religion's status in Hegel's system thoroughly depends upon its use of symbolic forms.<sup>4</sup> However, even O'Regan underestimates the value of the symbolic representation for Hegel's concept of religion,



for he too sees religion as reaching its fulfillment in its move away from sensuous forms of representation and toward more abstract kinds of representations. In point of fact, religion can maintain its independent, absolute status in Hegel's system only through its use of symbolic representation which, by definition, contains a sensuous component. Even though Hegel emphasizes that religious representations must be subjected to thought, he also maintains that it is precisely "the way of sensuous representation" (*die Weise des sinnlichen Vorstellens*) that constitutes "the point of distinction between religion and philosophy" (*VPR I-m*, p. 234). Since religion's inclusion of thought amalgamates it to philosophy, it *requires* a symbolic element in order to remain distinct from philosophy and so absolute in its own right. Far from detracting from religion's absolute status, then, the finitude that characterizes symbolic representation proves essential to it. Thus, once again, we discover that Derrida's emphasis on spirit's mediation by the sign proves insufficient to a complete understanding of Hegel's notion of spirit. Absolute spirit requires the mediation of religion's symbolic representation.

Part one of this chapter will delineate the role of symbolic representation within religious consciousness, as Hegel understands it. Here we will observe that although symbolic representation functions in different ways depending upon the specific religion, it is essential to Hegel's general concept of religion. Part two will show how symbolic representation functions in various "finite" religions. Here we will see how the symbolic element of religion contributes to spirit's absoluteness by beginning to establish spirit's self-identification, as well as by conditioning its experience of differentiation and enabling it to undergo the process of unification. Finally, part three will delineate the role that symbolic representation performs in absolute religion. Here, in contrast to those commentators who emphasize absolute religion's connection with thought, we will indicate the way in which the symbolic continues to be fundamental at this level. In addition, though we will question Hegel's historical application of his concepts along with his exclu-

sive privileging of Christianity, we will come to see why his philosophy of religion is a vital, if underestimated, aspect of his whole system. For it is in his philosophy of religion that Hegel most clearly specifies his conception of spirit as *the differentiated unity of the divine and the human*. It is his philosophy of religion, therefore, which most explicitly discredits not only those who follow Marx and interpret the Hegelian spirit in terms of *mere* human creation, but also those of the Christian right who interpret it as existing in a realm *beyond* human creation. Spirit, for Hegel, refers to a human-divine unity that is permeated by its own internal difference. It is a self-differentiating identity that lends itself to symbolic representation.

## I. Religious Consciousness as Symbolic

### A. Pre-representational Forms of Religious Consciousness

As we have already noted, Hegel maintains that representation (*Vorstellung*) is the form of consciousness proper to religious consciousness.<sup>5</sup> He acknowledges that religious consciousness may also present itself in the forms of feeling (*Gefühl*) and intuition (*Anschauung*), but he maintains that these forms have their logical culmination in representation. Hegel observes, for example, that religious consciousness may experience the simple unmediated feeling of the certainty of God (*VPR I-m*, p. 168), but he argues that this kind of knowledge is completely abstract: it grasps God simply as existing, without any further characteristics or determinations. Such immediate knowledge (i.e., knowledge in the sense of *Wissen* rather than *Erkennen* [*VPR I-s*, pp. 115–17]) grasps God “as merely something general,” “the most general personality” (*VPR I-m*, p. 170). Here the word “God” does not have any determinate content; it simply refers to that which lies beyond sensuous intuition. On this level one knows only *that* God is, but not *what* God is (*VPR I-m*, pp. 171–73). According to Hegel, however, religious consciousness cannot posit God in such abstraction

without also beginning to imagine the determinations of the God it asserts to exist. For this reason, religious feeling necessarily passes into representation and continues only through such representation (*VPR I-m*, pp. 291–92).

In cultures in which the aesthetic and religious moments are intimately linked and the productions of art are given a religious meaning or function, religious consciousness may take the form of *intuition*. In these cultures religious consciousness intuits spirit in and through the sensuous existence of the work of art. As Hegel explains, “Art rests upon and derives from the interest to represent the spiritual idea for consciousness and first for immediate intuition” (*VPR I-m*, pp. 173–74). According to Hegel, this form of religious consciousness signifies an advance over the indeterminacy of the form of feeling because it includes an implicit awareness of the otherness intrinsic to spirit. Yet it falls short of religious representation because it fails to recognize an identity between itself and its object: it finds the religious object in the immediacy of the work of art instead of in its own act of consciousness. Moreover, as we saw in chapter two, when the intelligence operates through the form of intuition, it perceives its content as something simply “there” and predetermined—that is, as something external to the intelligence’s act of formation. In reality, as Hegel contends, the object of religious consciousness is not something that can be projected upon or encapsulated in an immediate sensuous presence. Strictly speaking, it is not an immediate object at all—not something “simply there”—but *the whole act* of spirit identifying its subjective and objective moments. Thus, while religious intuition through art improves upon the immediate certainty of feeling by adding an element of difference and mediation, it does not catch sight of the spirit that is common to both the intuiting self-consciousness and the intuited work of art (*VPR I-s*, p. 138).

The first move toward overcoming the assumption of a total difference between the subject and the object of religious consciousness occurs when the intelligence internalizes its intuitions and puts them into its own place and time. By reflecting upon its intuitions in this way, the in-

telligence transforms them into *images* (*Bilder*). This act of reflection frees the images from their pure immediacy and makes them available for new syntheses (*ENZ III*, §452–53, Zus.). At this point consciousness contains the potency of religious images, but it does not attach subjective significance to them. It has, for example, the generic images of mother and child, ox, lion, light, etc., but it does not give them further, religious meaning. They are not yet symbolic. What it still lacks is an historical or poetic existence that can confirm the reality of its images and grant them actual determination. Once this is given, the intelligence becomes able to associate its interior image with an external, existing reality. Recognizing the identity between the two, it unites them into a single, “real” *representation* (*Vorstellung*) (cf. *ENZ III*, §454).

### *B. Religious Representation and the Symbolic*

Hegel sees representation (*die Vorstellung*) as appropriate to religion because it identifies the religious object with religious consciousness (*VPR I-m*, p. 297). Unlike feeling, which constitutes the merely subjective side of religion, religious representation unites the particularity of an external object or image with a more general, subjective conception (*VPR I-m*, pp. 291–92). Religious consciousness places the image within a larger context and thus attributes further meaning to it. In so doing, it goes beyond the mere presentation of images and *re-presents* them as *symbols*. Here, in the case of religion, as opposed to the case of most artistic forms, this act of symbolization is not limited to the attribution of additional meaning to sensuous objects, but also includes symbolic conceptions such as stories that illustrate religious themes (*VPR I-m*, pp. 293–95).

Hegel's description of religious representation strongly resembles his definition of the symbol. He asserts, for example, that religious consciousness consists in a move from an immediate particular to a general meaning, from the finite to the infinite (*VPR I-m*, p. 308). “Religious consciousness . . . is in itself the *dismissal* and *forsaking* of the

immediate, of the *finite* and the transition to the intellectual or, objectively determined, the gathering of the transient in its absolute substantial essence" (*VPR I-s*, p. 106). He also characterizes religion, like the symbol, as the activity of positing the single as the general (*VPR III-m*, pp. 243–44, 248). Indeed, for Hegel, "Religious practice (*die Kultus*) is thus in general the eternal process of the subject setting himself in identity with his essence" (*VPR I-s*, p. 75). Through religious devotion, which is based upon symbolic representation, the generality of spirit takes place in the individual subject (*VPR III-m*, p. 249). According to Hegel, whether one is fully conscious of it or not, one practices religion in order to unite one's particularity with one's generality, one's finitude with one's absoluteness. Through religious practice, one identifies oneself with a more comprehensive and therefore truer whole.

Not only does religious representation attribute general meaning to that which is immediate and particular, but it establishes this identification in the manner of the symbol—that is, on the basis of a commonality between the particular immediacy and the general meaning. Essentially connected to the sensuous, the symbolic representation of religion entails a degree of ambiguity because it does not intrinsically clarify which of the qualities of its expression pertain to its meaning (*VPR I-m*, p. 235). It is also limited by the fact that its moments are connected externally rather than internally, through words such as "also" and "and," rather than through logical necessity. A representation of the divine may convey, for example, that God is "all-good" and "all-wise," but it does not demonstrate how these predicates are related to each other (*VPR III-m*, p. 132; *VPR I-s*, pp. 144, 151–54). Attached to the sensuous and distanced from pure thought, representation holds opposites apart, conceiving the general as separate from the particular, the infinite as opposed to the finite, and content as distinct from form. As a result, a difference between the symbol and its asserted significance remains: the established identification is only partial. Consequently, a single religious representation may be interpreted as having very

different, and even conflicting meanings. The lighting of a candle in a religious ceremony, for example, may be interpreted by one person as a symbol of hope and by another as a symbol of knowledge. A third person might understand the size or shape of the candle as essential to the meaning, and another might see the act of the lighting as more essential than the light itself. Given this ambiguity, Hegel admits that when philosophy transforms representations to thought, it often finds it difficult to determine which elements belong to the content and which to the form of representation (*VPR I-m*, pp. 293–94). Religious representation is also ambiguous in the manner of the symbol in that it does not intrinsically indicate whether it is to be taken in an immediate literal sense or in some transferred or transfigured sense. Hegel says, for example, that when we read about the tree of good and evil, we do not know whether to take it as something historical or as an image, whether to take it literally or as bearing a meaning other than what it first seems to present (*VPR I-m*, pp. 293–94). Moreover, as a result of the fact that religious consciousness does not explicate the basis of the identifications it implicitly asserts in its act of representation, it also fails to recognize its identifications as limited. For example, according to Hegel, in believing that light is good, the followers of the ancient Persian Zoroastrian religion do not explicitly acknowledge the sense in which this identification is false. Instead, they assume that the sun is absolutely good, and thereby attribute absolute value to something of finite nature. In other words, they mistakenly *absolutize* the truth of the statement “light is good,” instead of considering the sense in which it is not true—that is, instead of thinking about it speculatively.<sup>6</sup>

According to Hegel, finite and absolute religion both involve this symbolic element, though they do so in different ways and to different extents. In his view, finite religions use symbols that perpetuate the distinction between their own consciousness and its content, their religious subjectivity and its divine object. As a result, they are not led toward reflection and thus to the ultimate identity between their own consciousness and that which is posited as

external to it. By contrast, absolute religion works with symbolic representations that are themselves understood to embody the perfect unity of the human and the divine. This subjectivity is therefore inclined toward an awareness of the identity between its symbolic forms and its own activity. It realizes the inappropriateness of religious consciousness's tendency to represent its object as other than itself and it incorporates its symbolic identifications as positive, but limited moments of itself. What this means is that absolute religion makes its meaning present, even while it uses symbolic representations, which suggest that its meaning is beyond it. Absolute religion includes the finitude of representation's form, but it understands this finitude as part of its own self-relation (*VPR I-m*, p. 225). Thus Hegel's understanding of spirit's progress from finite religions to absolute religion may be interpreted as a progress from the unreflective use of symbols to the conscious awareness of their necessity and their limitation.

Hegel's claim that a particular kind of *division* characterizes religious consciousness also suggests a parallel with the symbol. The primary work of the symbol is to establish an identification, but since it cannot do this perfectly, it also sustains a difference between its form and its meaning. In the same way religious consciousness holds fast to the difference between its own activity of representation (its form) and its object of representation (its meaning). Stating this point in specifically religious terms, Hegel contends that religious consciousness upholds the difference between "*subjective consciousness*" and "*God as object in itself*" (*VPR I-s*, p. 52). Specifically, it is the side of consciousness that constitutes the difference within religion as well as within spirit more generally considered (*VPR I-m*, 229; see also *ENZ III*, p. 227; *VPR I-s*, pp. 107, 200). In religious consciousness this moment of difference is especially pronounced because religious consciousness tends to conceive of spirit as an external object, somewhere "out there," beyond itself. It therefore involves a split or a doubling of spirit: spirit relates to itself *as if* to an other (*VPR III-m*, p. 105). As consciousness, it does not yet realize that what it

takes as its object is actually a part of its own subjectivity. Once developed in absolute religion, however, spirit reconciles this division of consciousness. It uses religious representation, but rises above the limitation of this form even while it incorporates it. In absolute religion human subjectivity realizes its divine object to be itself and the divine infinity realizes itself concretely in the objective human community. Through these acts of recognition, spirit becomes absolutely free: "for here spirit relates itself no longer to something other and limited, but to something unlimited and infinite, and this is an infinite relation, a relation of freedom and no longer of dependence" (*VPR I-s*, p. 12). Through this religion human beings raise themselves to the highest level of subjectivity and bring themselves into a domain that is "free from relation to an other," sufficient in itself, and unconditioned (*VPR I-s*, p. 12).

However, the difference between subject and object does not disappear even in the reconciliation of absolute religion. It is simply no longer viewed as an ultimate contradiction. According to Hegel, a certain inappropriateness (*Unangemessenheit*) between the finite, natural immediacy and the generality of God *remains* in spirit even in its culmination: "This inappropriateness is, lies in the nature of spirit. . . . This inappropriateness cannot disappear; otherwise the judgment (*Urteil*) of spirit, its liveliness, would disappear; thus spirit would cease being spirit" (*VPR III-m*, pp. 234–35; see also *VPR I-m*, p. 212; *VPR III-m*, pp. 105–106). Spirit overcomes this otherness through its process of self-recognition, but in order to be the act, the life, that it is, it must continue to posit this otherness "eternally" (*VPR III-m*, pp. 234–35). Though absolute religion transforms the incongruity between subject and object and reconciles the alienation between the divine and human, it does not eradicate the difference: it merely shows how this difference is based upon a more fundamental identity. The spirit of absolute religion realizes the inappropriateness of religious consciousness's tendency to represent its object *as other than itself*, but it does not cease to rely upon the form of symbolic representation. It



comprehends religious consciousness's use of representation as a necessary *part* of its whole experience.

Religious consciousness, whose most appropriate form is representation, thus tends toward symbolization in three significant ways. First, it *attributes a general meaning or conception to immediacies* that have some qualities in common with that general meaning as well as qualities that are distinct from it. Relying on the capacity of the associative imagination that works according to the principle of self-identification, it seeks to unify its images into a coherent whole. Secondly, it *communicates its meaning ambiguously* because it does not clarify the basis or limitation of the identification it asserts. Sometimes, too, as a result of this lack of clarification, it may mistake something finite for something infinite and fail to acknowledge the limitations of the identification it asserts. Finally, in one way or another it *sustains a divergence between its form and its meaning*, its activity of representation and the object it seeks to represent. Without recognizing the limitations of religious consciousness and its form of representation, spirit cannot come to see its "other" as itself; therefore it cannot avoid being alienated from itself in some way. The representations of religious consciousness *symbolize* spirit's self-unity, but they do not manifest it completely. By presupposing a distinction between its objective experience and its subjective act, symbolic representations prevent religious consciousness from realizing the complete unity of its spirit. In Hegel's judgment, then, the great extent to which religious consciousness works symbolically grounds its merely finite status. Suffering the limits inherent to the process of symbolization, finite religions fail to realize the full identification of their own conscious activity and their religious object.

The necessity that religious consciousness be symbolic derives, on the one hand, from the structure of consciousness: to be conscious is to have an object, to know an other. But the necessity of the symbolic also follows from the very structure of *spirit*. For Spirit is "essentially" the act of self-appearance ("*sich zu erscheinen*") (VPR I-m, p. 230) and

"Appearance is being for an other" (*Erscheinen ist Sein für Anderes*) (*VPR I-m*, p. 231). Part of what constitutes spirit as such is the experience of difference that defines consciousness, the experience of *not* knowing its other as itself. In order to be, to *become* spirit, spirit must appear to itself as other; it must externalize itself, manifest itself, move beyond itself. Before it can rise above the limitations of mere consciousness and become the infinite, self-relating unity its concept supposes it to be, it must appear to itself as outside of itself. It must, in other words, take on various symbolic forms. But even after it recognizes its object as itself in absolute religion, spirit remains in need of the symbolic. Its discovery of its self-identity does not delete its internal difference; its being as spirit eliminates neither its experience as consciousness nor its need for symbolic representation.

## II. Symbolic Elements of Finite Religions

As we have already noted, Hegel delineates the ideal of religion as the transition by which spirit comes to know itself not just as substance but also *as subject* and thus as *spirit*. As was the case with art, his criterion for evaluation is based upon the degree of subjectivity he finds expressed in the various cultural manifestations of spirit. In his view, the more spirit can find itself in its other, the more free, the more realized it is. Since both art and religion involve spirit's coming to a knowledge of itself in its difference, spirit's religious progress through different cultures strongly resembles its artistic progress. But the two processes are not identical. Nor is the cultural ordering. As we have already seen, art and religion are two independent modes of absolute spirit, and their processes of development are based upon two fundamentally different principles. Through art, spirit comes to know itself specifically in the externality of the sensuous. It develops its internal subjectivity through various sensuous appearances, and seeks, in turn, an appropriate form for this subjective

content. In some cultures this process is intimately bound up with spirit's religious progression, but even in these cases religious development may be distinguished from its artistic development. In religion spirit's object is another *subjectivity*; it finds itself, not in the sensuous form to which it still has recourse, but in the subjectivity *that this form represents*.

Gradually, through its religious progression, spirit grasps the identity of its subjectivity and its objectivity and comes to know itself as the whole relation. To be sure, Hegel understands this process historically, and his particular cultural analyses suffer the limits of his own historical understanding. His claim that every culture except that of modern Protestantism (i.e., "absolute" religion) lacks a clear and complete conception of subjectivity may well be disputed. But Hegel's predisposition for Christianity should not prevent us from realizing the great value of his understanding of spiritual subjectivity and freedom as residing within the differentiated unity of the human and the divine. Nor should it blind us to the challenge of "absolute" freedom that this conception implies.

In the following section we will analyze Hegel's discussion of four of the religions he categorizes as finite in order to show how their use of symbolic representation both enables and limits their consciousness of spirit. Of the many finite religions Hegel discusses, we will treat four religions that represent key points in the development of subjectivity: A) Hinduism, the religion of the imagination (*Phantasie*) and the midpoint of the natural religions; B) Egyptian religion, the religion of riddles (*Rätsel*) and the transition from the natural religions to the religions of spiritual individuality; C) Greek religion, the religion of beauty (*Schönheit*) based on the principle of finite subjectivity; and D) Jewish religion, the religion of sublimity (*Erhabenheit*) and of abstract infinite subjectivity.<sup>7</sup> In the course of this analysis we will see how Hegel understands each of these religions to exhibit the characteristics of symbolization listed above. We will see how each: 1) attributes a general meaning to an immediacy that only partially resembles that meaning,

2) lacks clarity in the communication of its meaning, and 3) sustains an opposition between subject and object, form and content, immediate expression and attributed meaning. (For the sake of convenience we will occasionally refer to these three main symbolic characteristics in abbreviated terms—that is, as *attributing*, *ambiguous*, and *alienating*.) Moreover, we will see how the symbolic contributes to spirit's absoluteness by linking spirit with that which appears as other than it and by enabling it to become concretely self-differentiated. As spirit progresses through these finite religions, it creates a series of symbolic identifications that allow it to confront a variety of "other" forms of subjectivity.

#### A. *Indian Religion, the Religion of Imagination* (Phantasie)

Hegel identifies the nature religions as those which conceive of the spiritual and the natural in an "unclouded, undisturbed unity" (*VPR II-m*, p. 144). The divine is known in the form of natural objects such as the sun, the sky, rivers, and trees (*VPR II-m*, p. 155). In the earliest of the nature religions, spirit is quite limited because it has not yet distanced itself from the sensuous (*VPR II-m*, p. 152). But spirit gradually undergoes a process of differentiation, and by the time it manifests itself in the Indian Hindu religion, the midpoint of the nature religions, it begins to exhibit a degree of freedom (*VPR II-m*, pp. 222–25). Here the divine lives in "the kingdom of the imagination," which creates an "infinite multiplicity" of forms that do not exist in sensuous immediacy and so indicate a degree of self-determination (*VPR II-m*, p. 225). For example, when spirit is represented in a human being with several arms and legs, it exhibits an awareness of itself as existing in a way that transcends the immediacy of the human body. However, according to Hegel, the representations of this religion of the imagination do not correspond to the true being of spirit (*VPR II-m*, pp. 226–27). Spirit confronts an "other" spirit, but only in "accidental" forms which produce and

reveal a kind of “confusion” (*VPR II-m*, p. 236). Spirit’s identification, in other words, is symbolic.

According to Hegel, Hinduism conceives of its substantial power in a very abstract manner (*VPR II-m*, pp. 228–29). Instead of seeing “Brahman” as a concrete subjectivity, this religious consciousness understands its central figure as “the eternal rest of being-in-self” (*VPR II-m*, p. 228). In so doing, it symbolically identifies with an abstract generality conceived as the negation of all that is concrete; Hindu consciousness attributes the ultimate level of human fulfillment to the repudiation of determinate, differentiated being. Consequently, Hegel sees this religious consciousness as falling drastically short of representing anything like concrete freedom or the self-determination by a subject that understands itself to be a unity of differences. Far from being “free spirit” in his sense of the term, this consciousness, Hegel says, does not determine itself in any way, shape, or form (*VPR II-m*, pp. 232–33).<sup>8</sup>

Hegel also claims that this lack of differentiation and real subjectivity reveals itself through the Hindu conception of a triune god. As is the case in the Christian trinity, the Indian *Trimurti* consists of three gods who are actually one. Brahma, the creator, is the first, Krischna or Vischnu, the incarnation of Brahma, is the second, and Shiva, the return of Brahma to itself, is the third. Although Hegel himself cannot help noticing the similarity between the Hindu conception of the trinity and that of the Christian trinity, which he interprets as being in accordance with the logic of the concept, he emphasizes the difference between the two conceptions (*VPR II-m*, p. 230). Admitting that the Indian conception of the divine does accord with the structure of the concept, he nonetheless argues that this conception lacks the full subjectivity of spirit. He acknowledges that Brahma expresses the concept of a general essence in the form of a subject, but he argues that the difference between this abstract neutrality and the subject is not really maintained since each Hindu god stands at once for itself and for the whole of the trinity (*VPR I-m*, p. 228–31). Brahma, for example, is un-

derstood as both the creator and the created, such that he speaks of something higher than himself, though he is the highest. Hegel also maintains that the beings of the *Trimurti* lack spiritual subjectivity because they contain neither a real "other" nor a real principle of reconciliation (*VPR II-m*, pp. 228–31). The trinity falls short of the logical concept because its differentiation falls back into simple totality rather than introducing difference into its self-relation (*VPR II-m*, 228–29). The lack of subjectivity is also revealed, according to Hegel, in that the Hindu god does not really *act*, as does the true subject. In making this assertion Hegel dismisses the cultural testimonies to the god's activity as "either [falsely] imagined (*nur eingebildet*) or belong(ing) to the varying (*wechselnden*) incarnations" (that is, concerning several individuals instead of a single god) (*VPR I-s*, p. 418). Similarly, Hegel judges the Hindu conception of incarnation to be superficial because it entails abstract, rather than real, negation. According to Hegel, when an Indian god such as Indra dies one thousand deaths and chooses a new body each time, its substance remains the same. Consequently there is no real loss or differentiation and thus no real self-identification: "this death, this negation, has nothing to do with the substance; the negation is not posited in the self, in the subject as such" (*VPR I-s*, pp. 421, 353; see also *VPR II-m*, p. 262).

Worse than the centrality of this abstract attribution is the alienating consequence of Hinduism's religious consciousness. According to Hegel, this consciousness attributes freedom and spiritual independence to a totally abstract being opposed to the realm of human experience. It conceives of all finite things either as disappearing within this one substantial being or as existing externally to it. "Being (*das Sein*) thereby reduces itself from itself to the mere *outside-of-me*, and it is supposed to mean expressly only the *negative of myself*" (*VPR I-s*, p. 348). Hinduism, in other words, envisions a total division between the concrete determination that is located at the level of human reality and the empty abstract being that is supposed to be the

locus of truth and freedom (*VPR II-m*, p. 251). Consequently, it alienates human beings from their self-determining capacity and opposes spirit to itself.

The attribution of freedom to the state of Brahman leads to ambiguity and confusion as well. Because Hindu religious consciousness offers no clarification for its assertion of identity between abstract immediacy and spiritual freedom, it alternates quite irregularly between these two poles of its representation—"the one abstract being" and the many inessential determinacies (*VPR II-m*, p. 231). Depicting the absolute as flowing into the many in a haphazard, unsystematic way, this consciousness fails to exercise the logical categories of relation. Its determinations, Hegel says, are "baroque and often have a wild, repulsive, form" (*VPR II-m*, pp. 226–28). Spiritual independence is attributed to completely accidental and natural things, and "Great objects of nature like the Ganges, the sun, the Himalayas . . . are identified with Brahman itself" (*VPR I-s*, pp. 336, 352). Natural objects and processes such as originating, passing, and changing are understood abstractly; they are neither "posited as ideal" (that is, explicitly comprehended as being of spirit) nor conceptually distinguished from spirit (*VPR I-s*, p. 334). Moreover, just as this religious consciousness fails to recognize the source of its symbolic identification, it also fails to recognize the limitation of the principle of difference. The moments of difference represented in Hinduism maintain their immediacy and independence from one another and are related to the one basic unity only in an unconscious, "*spiritless*" way (*VPR II-m*, p. 227). As Hegel concludes, Hindu religious consciousness limits itself by giving the imagination the final say: "the world . . . is thus placed in the service of the imagination; the divine world is in the kingdom (*Reich*) of the imagination" (*VPR II-m*, p. 225). In Hegel's view, reason does not come into play at all in this religion.

Nonetheless, the Hindu conception of spirit is essential to spirit's development and to the process of differentiation which constitutes it as absolute. For here spirit has recognized that there exists a determining power beyond the im-

mediacy of nature. Moreover, in honoring the spirit of Brahman, it also recognizes a kind of generality. The Hindu spirit recognizes its "other" as a general form toward which its particularity strives. Since the generality conceived by Hinduism is no longer conceived as in immediate unity with all of nature, it also represents an important moment of spiritual differentiation. Spirit strives toward a point of eternal rest, but finds itself in the necessary and continuous process of development.

*B. Egyptian Religion, the Religion of Riddles (Rätsel)*

For Hegel, the Egyptian religion marks the transition from the natural religions to the religions of spiritual individuality and freedom (*VPR II-m*, p. 259). Instead of seeing spirit as an abstraction opposed to nature, Egyptian religious consciousness begins to identify spirit with human subjectivity. It can do this because it recognizes subjectivity, not as an abstract generality, but as including negativity and difference within it (*VPR II-m*, p. 265). As Hegel explains, Egyptian consciousness comprehends the positivity of the negative; it grasps "that negation is posited with negation, that death is made to die, the principle of evil is overcome" (*VPR II-m*, p. 269). Accordingly, whereas Hegel characterizes the Hindu representations of the death of their gods as superficial, he argues that Egyptian religion conceives the death of their gods in a more substantial way. They see death as part of what constitutes the very reality of the divine instead of as merely belonging to an individual incarnation of a god (*VPR II-m*, p. 270). For Hegel this marks a decisive advance. The incorporation of the negative allows Egyptian religious consciousness to conceive of the divine as having a more concrete, "posited power" (*gesetzte Macht*) (*VPR II-m*, p. 263). The divine is grasped as freely self-determining subjectivity (*VPR II-m*, p. 280). The god Osiris, for example, is understood as including the negative principle within himself and so as a kind of subject who establishes conceptions of justice, rights, and value (*VPR II-m*, pp. 519–22).



Nonetheless, Hegel suggests that the Egyptian conception of spiritual subjectivity is still quite limited. Egyptian religious consciousness, he says, constitutes the “transition” from “substance” to “subject” (*VPR II-m*, p. 265), but here “the subject is still formal, still limited” and still “abstract” (*VPR II-m*, pp. 268, 522). According to Hegel, the Egyptian conception of the subject is more concrete than that of the nature religions because it is more closely associated with the human form, but it is less concrete than that of absolute religion because it does not conceive of spirit as inhering in an immediately existing person in time and space (*VPR II-m*, p. 522). Spiritual subjectivity exists in the representative imagination of Egyptian religious consciousness, but it is not conceived as pertaining to any particular living individual. In other words, as Hegel explicitly notes, Egyptian religious consciousness begins to conceive of spiritual subjectivity, but it does so in a *symbolic* manner (*VPR II-m*, pp. 524–25). Instead of grasping the divine in the form of a specific historical individual, it establishes an identification of the human and the divine through representation. Specifically, Egyptian religious consciousness uses the objects of nature to symbolize spiritual subjectivity, and it uses human figures to symbolize spiritual realities such as justice and goodness. Accordingly, the god Osiris is both represented by something and representative of something, both symbolized and symbolizing (*VPR II-m*, p. 519). As Hegel explains, “The story of Osiris is thus the story of the sun: the sun goes to its culmination point, then withdraws; its rays, its power become dim . . . , (but then) it begins to raise itself up again—it is reborn with new power. Osiris means the sun and the sun Osiris” (*VPR II-m*, p. 524). The sun, as well as the Nile, the seasons of the year, and other natural phenomena, are understood as being Osiris—that is, as going through this process of death and resurrection, differentiation and return-to-self, which Hegel sees as constituting the subject (*VPR II-m*, p. 263). Osiris is understood as having the characteristics of these natural objects and processes as well as representing the divine life principle itself. Thus there is a *double attribution*: the immediacy of the sun symbolizes

Osiris, and Osiris symbolizes the life principle that underlies this and other natural phenomena.

The natural element that Egyptian consciousness attributes to its conception of free subjectivity causes Egyptian religion to tend heavily toward *ambiguity*. In the first place, although Egyptian religious consciousness confronts an other subjectivity as divine, it does not understand subjectivity as completely essential to divinity. This is shown, on the one hand, by the fact that in representing subjectivity, Egyptian religion often presents animal forms as well as forms that mix the human and the animal (*VPR I-s*, p. 417; *VPR II-m*, p. 266). Hegel's favorite example of this mix-up is the Sphinx, a combination of the human and the animal forms, which he interprets as a confession that "subjectivity is not yet clear about itself" (*VPR I-s*, p. 439). In Egyptian religious representation, the immediately present and the idea of the divine are conflated "so that either the divine is made into a present thing (*zu einem Gegenwärtigen*) or, on the other side, the human, indeed even animal forms are raised up to the divine and spiritual moment" (*VPR I-s*, p. 433). So it is not surprising that Egyptians understood their kings as descending from gods and worshipped them along with various types of animals (*VPR I-s*, p. 433). But, to Hegel, such conceptions are far from satisfactory: "the essential differences have still not mediated themselves and [are not yet] spiritually penetrated; rather they are still mixed up (*vermischt*)" (*VPR I-s*, p. 432). "What is lacking in the Egyptian principle is still the clarity, the transparency of the natural, of the externality of the forming" (*VPR II-m*, p. 531).

In addition to such ambiguity, these representations indicate that a significant degree of opposition between human reality and the spiritual power of free self-determination still exists in Egyptian religious consciousness. The Egyptians conceive of the divine as a hidden "inwardness," a mystery that has not yet shown itself, rather than as something externally expressed and worked out in history. As a result, Egyptian religious consciousness perpetuates a division between the human and the divine, the finite and the infinite, subjective activity

and objective being. It conceives of itself as estranged from the power of subjectivity it begins to conceive.

Nonetheless, the Egyptian religious conception of spirit is essential to spirit's development and to the processes of identification and differentiation which constitutes it as absolute. Here, the divine and the human become associated more predominantly with the human form than with natural ones. And here, for the first time, spirituality begins to be understood as having the differentiation that belongs to real subjectivity. Spirit, in other words, confronts itself as an other *subjective* spirit, and it recognizes itself as sharing in the negativity and finitude of this other. Indeed, it experiences this differentiation, negativity, and finitude quite intensely, for it bears their alienating, ambiguous consequences within itself.

### *C. Greek Religion, the Religion of Beauty (Schönheit)*

According to Hegel, the ancient Greek religion has subjectivity as its fundamental principle (*VPR II-m*, p. 533). Expressly distinct from the nature through which it appears, spirit manifests itself *as returning* to itself. It explicitly envisions itself as having subordinated nature, and it uses nature as a sign of its subjective power (*VPR II-m*, p. 549). More specifically, Greek religious consciousness conceives of its devotional object as particularizing itself in the form of a variety of self-determining divinities that are conceived as having human subjectivity and bodily form (*VPR II-m*, pp. 356–57, 544, 552). Thus, in contrast to the religions discussed so far, which understood the divine as being outside the realm of human reality, Greek religion represents an affirmative relationship between human beings and their gods (*VPR II-m*, p. 554).

However, according to Hegel, while this understanding of subjectivity allows the Greeks to achieve ideal beauty, it does not suffice to bring them absolute freedom. In his opinion, Greek spirit masters nature, but it does not master itself. Technically speaking, its consciousness contains the principle of finite, but not of *infinite* subjectivity (*VPR II-m*, p. 545). The subjectivity attributed to gods as well as to hu-

mans is understood to be limited by the power of fate—that is, by an external, “other” power. Therefore, Hegel argues that Greek religion precludes the possibility of spirit knowing itself absolutely: it maintains a division between necessity and fate, on the one hand, and self-determining consciousness on the other (*VPR II-m*, pp. 559–60). The Greek is not completely free, Hegel says, because “he lets himself be determined from the outside” (*VPR II-m*, p. 560). “In the relation to necessity, the subject is not for itself, self-determined for *itself*; rather it has given up itself, (it) keeps no purpose for itself” (*VPR II-s*, p. 111). The various subjective, self-determining divinities represented in human form are conceived as estranged from the power of ultimate self-determination; the general and the various particulars, the finite self-consciousness and a more ultimate, “essential” power are opposed (*VPR II-m*, p. 359). Therefore, despite the ability of Greek religious consciousness to conceive of the human and the divine as united, it fails to unite itself with the determining power of absolute spirit. It uses nature as a sign of its self-consciousness (*VPR II-m*, p. 549), but since it has not yet grasped the full power of subjectivity, its religious self-presentation remains symbolic. In other words, the alienation Greek religious consciousness conceives between itself and its fate reduces its self-consciousness to a symbolic relation.

More specifically, the failure to recognize the infinite power of subjectivity leads the Greeks to fall back into the practice of symbolizing spirituality through nature. Even though Greek consciousness has won over nature in a certain way, it still contains a significant natural element (*VPR II-m*, p. 547). This is especially evident in the Greek's representation of their gods, for as Hegel sees them, the Greek gods have a kind of “doubled” existence (*VPR II-m*, p. 366). This doubling inclines the Greeks toward symbolism, Hegel claims, because the spiritual and natural sides “fall apart” and so defy perfect unification (*VPR II-m*, pp. 536–38, 549). The Greeks represent their gods through natural forms such as the sun, the sky, and the sea, and they use the human form to personify human qualities, conditions, and experiences such as love and war and various

internal subjective powers (*VPR II-m*, pp. 366–69). They attribute general divine powers to the immediacy of natural elements and take the particularities of specific gods to mean general human qualities. Thus, like the gods of the Egyptians, the Greek gods are both symbolizing and symbolized (*VPR II-s*, pp. 105–106). Zeus, for example, serves to symbolize law and ethics, on the one hand, and he is symbolized by the natural atmosphere, especially the natural power of thunder, on the other hand. This same duplicity applies to virtually all the other “new” Greek gods as well (*VPR II-m*, p. 366). In this connection, Hegel also draws attention to the fact that since the particular gods have well-developed subjectivities, they contain much that is “accidental” to their meaning and to the concept in general (*VPR II-m*, p. 369). They contain, in other words, the ambiguities typical of the symbol. For example, if a poet speaks of the sun, it may not be clear whether he or she means to refer to the sun, the subjective character of Apollo or Phoebus, or the abstract quality of clarity.

It is true, however, that Hegel occasionally refers to the unity of the divine and the human in Greek consciousness as perfect, and he emphasizes that Greek subjectivity expresses itself by using nature as its sign (*VPR II-m*, p. 549). But his elaboration of the symbolic elements of the Greek imagination constitutes a qualification of this assertion. For Hegel, the “perfect” unity of the human and the divine in Greek religion occurs only in its artistic dimension (and even there with certain qualifications, as we saw in the previous chapter). Within the realm of the imagination the unity is perfect, but with respect to the whole range of religious spirit and to the generality of thought, it is still limited. As Hegel explains, the Greeks recognize the appropriateness of the *form* of the human body to spirit, but do not see that actual individual bodies are inappropriate to spirit: “The single real human in itself however still has the side of *immediate naturalness* in his immediate being (*Dasein*), which appears as a timely and transient thing which has fallen down out of generality” (*VPR II-s*, p. 122). But the real problem in Hegel’s view seems to be the multiplicity of the gods, not their immediate natural-

ness, for as he implies, this immediate naturalness could be reduced to a mere sign if the divine were to be present in a single historical person only (VPR II-s, pp. 124–25). Hegel acknowledges that the Greeks sometimes build an element of historicism into their mythology, “but,” he says, “we do not take it very seriously” (*aber wir machen nicht recht Ernst daraus*) (VPR I-s, p. 142). In his view it is clear that the Greeks merely *imagine* the gods they represent: “the gods of the Greeks are made by human imagination. . . . they thus arise in a finite way, produced from poets, from Muses” and are not grasped by reason or even by the understanding (VPR II-m, pp. 549–51). These formal representations consequently fall very short of absolute religion’s conception of a one-time historical event in which the divine takes upon the full immediacy and finitude of a single human body. As Hegel sees it, Greek religious consciousness enacts the reconciliation of the human and the divine in the realm of poetic conception and sculptural art, but not in the realm of actual historical immediacy.

Nonetheless, the symbolic element of spirit as expressed in Greek religion allows spirit to particularize itself to a greater extent than ever. Equally importantly, spirit confronts itself in the ambiguous position of not being able to determine its ultimate fate. It finds itself opposed to the absolute power of determination which its concept supposes it to be. As a result, it gains a greater consciousness of the true meaning of finitude. Here spirit is not just finite: it *knows* itself as such. It undergoes this experience in all its tragedy. But for Hegel, this tragedy is not only negative. Through this experience of loss and finitude spirit discovers the disadvantage of its multiplicity and begins to seek self-unification.

#### D. Jewish Religion, the Religion of Sublimity (Erhabenheit)

By Hegel’s assessment Greek and Jewish religion have in common the “ideality of the natural”: both religions expressly subordinate nature to spiritual subjectivity (VPR II-m, p. 561). In Greek religion spirit manifests

itself in various subjective powers which each take on the beautiful form of the human being, and the ground of the manifestation is external sensuousness and sensuous representation. For this reason, with respect to the principle of art, Hegel considers Greek culture superior to Jewish culture. Interestingly, however, he judges Jewish religion superior to Greek religion<sup>9</sup> because it conceives of spirit as farther removed from the sensuous (though certainly not less symbolic). In the Jewish religion, Hegel says, "the particular spiritual powers, the ethical (*die sittliche*), are brought together in a spiritual unity" and thought serves as its ultimate "ground" (*VPR II-m*, p. 561). What this means in religious terms is that God is now conceived as having absolute power; the divine is understood as a single infinite subjectivity, rather than as many finite ones (*VPR II-m*, p. 563). This subjectivity is still abstract, however, because the human world that this God determines or creates is viewed as an immediate other, rather than as an actual part of God. Although God and human beings are both understood to be subjectively self-determining, these two forms of subjectivity are not yet grasped as intrinsically related (*VPR II-m*, p. 563). God is understood "as opposed to the world that is his creation, opposed to the totality of his being-determinate (*Bestimmtseins*), its negation" (*VPR II-m*, p. 565).

Thus, in Hegel's view, Jewish religious consciousness perpetuates the false conception of the infinite divine as wholly other than the finite human. Here God is conceived as "self-to-self-relating subjectivity"—a divinity that does not stand in need of human realization (*VPR II-m*, p. 565). At the same time, the self-determination of human beings is understood to be totally dependent upon the will of its creator (*VPR II-s*, p. 56). Human freedom is limited to the following of externally given, inflexible laws (*VPR II-m*, p. 578). In short, Hegel believes that the Jewish religion alienates human consciousness from its divine object and, with that, spirit from its power of free self-determination.<sup>10</sup>

Due to this fundamental opposition between the divine and the human, the symbolization of Jewish religious con-

sciousness takes a most extreme form. Instead of attributing a general meaning to particular immediacies and symbolizing the divine positively, Jewish religious consciousness uses images to symbolize the divine *negatively* (*VPR II-m*, p. 569). The images it takes, however, are not primarily those of nature as was the case with the Hindu religion, but those of finite human existence. Seeing these as wholly inadequate to the divine, Jewish religious consciousness uses them to symbolize what God is *not*. A consciousness of the symbol's limitation thus dominates Jewish symbolic consciousness. Hegel calls this kind of consciousness "sublime," (*erhaben*) and as we have seen, he categorizes the sublime as a form of symbolization in his lectures on the philosophy of art. Here in his lectures on the philosophy of religion, he defines sublimity in terms of the appearance of God through a negation of the world: "Sublimity is first the appearance, relationship of this infinite subject to the world. The world is grasped as the manifestation of this subject, but as a manifestation that is not affirmative, or in that it is in fact affirmative, has the main character that the natural, the worldly, is negated as something inappropriate to the subjective" (*VPR II-m*, p. 569). But this use of sublime symbolism perpetuates the alienation conceived between the divine and the human. This, in turn, makes human beings divided against themselves; their spiritual and natural sides are set against each other (*VPR II-m*, pp. 571, 578).

In Hegel's estimation, this extreme disjunction between the human and the divine in Jewish religion also lends itself to particular ambiguities and confusions. For example, the law of this people is given an absolute significance even though it is a merely finite construction. For the finite consciousness of the Jews, this law expresses the highest purposes of God: "the lawfulness, this law (*dies Gesetzliche, Rechte*) is the divine, and in so far as it is something worldly [and] in finite consciousness, it is that which is posited by God" (*VPR II-s*, p. 67; see also *VPR II-m*, pp. 472–73). Moreover, the Jewish people's representation of the goal of spirit as the freedom and unity of their own community instead of



the free self-determination of the whole human community indicates a further aspect of confusion. It suggests that Jewish religion is based upon the contradiction of thinking an all-powerful God is limited to a single people. The Jewish God is at once conceived as a "national god" and as one God of the world (*VPR II-m*, pp. 575–77). By Hegel's logic the representation of such an exclusion necessarily results in the limitation of one's *own* freedom.

Despite its limitations, however, Hegel sees Jewish religious consciousness as enabling spirit to free itself from the subordination to a blind fate. Here, at least, human beings follow a law that is concretely articulated (*VPR II-m*, p. 572). Indeed, despite his severe criticisms of it, Hegel insists that this law has much positive value: it allows the people to determine their will in accordance with a general will (even if they do not recognize this will as their own), it forces them to turn into themselves, and it gives them a concrete and affirmative existence (*VPR II-m*, pp. 571–74). Fackenheim's praise of Hegel in this regard is nonetheless unwarranted. He claims: "Hegel surpasses Kant and all the other critics of Jewish 'legalism' in just this—that he understands the law of Judaism not as a bar between divine Giver and human recipient but rather as a bridge."<sup>11</sup> In point of fact, however, Hegel does view Jewish law as an impediment to the unity of the divine and the human and thus to the full self-determination of (human) spirit. The fact that the Jews receive their law from a God they conceive as external to themselves precludes the possibility of a free, self-determining divine-human unity. Yet, precisely because this law impedes full realization of this unity, it contributes to spirit's determination as differentiated. Here spirit is forced to grapple with concrete finite prescriptions that do not suit its particularity completely: it experiences the limits of a law that only *symbolizes* true freedom. As a result, it is spurred on to develop itself into a *true* infinity—an infinity that knows its finitude as part of itself.

In general, the symbolic representations of finite religions serve to constitute spirit's absoluteness because they allow spirit to experience itself as concretely differentiated

and thus condition its process of unification. Since the unity of the human and the divine that is spirit is not an immediate unity, but one that must *come* to be, the realization of spirit requires that it experience itself as not-yet unified. What this means in religious terms is that spirit must experience the imperfect unity of the human and the divine before it can experience the absolute unity that corresponds to the Idea of religion. Spirit must take on the finite forms of religion, which represent the divine as something other than the human before it can realize the complete unity of the two. But the finite forms of religious consciousness are not merely preliminary stages to a fully realized spirit. They are—and Hegel is quite explicit about this—precisely what offers determinacy to the conception of God (*VPR II-m*, p. 410). They are what serve to constitute spirit's internal difference. The symbolic element of religion introduces a moment of finitude into the previously abstract idea of spirit, and this finitude is “an essential moment of absolute spirit” (*VPR I-m*, p. 223). Hegel declares, “Without the moment of finitude there is no life, no subjectivity, no living (*lebendiges*) God” (*VPR I-m*, p. 212). Spirit does not leave its symbolic moment behind, but quite literally *lives off of it*, assimilating it only in order to express it and posit it again.

### III. Symbolic Elements of Absolute Religion

#### A. *Absolute versus Finite Religions*

According to Hegel, Christianity in its modern Protestant form constitutes absolute religion. In his view, it rises above the finite religions that precede it because it takes the subjectivity of religious experience as its very object (*VPR I-m*, pp. 219–20). Although the finite religions all contain or imply some conception of subjectivity, they project this subjectivity onto nature or onto gods who are external to their own subjectivity. As a result they fail to realize that their religious object lives within their *own* subjective act. By contrast, the spirit of absolute religion takes the subjective

relation of religion as its object and so positions itself to recognize this object's identity with its own activity (*VPR I-m*, p. 222). Consequently, absolute religion ceases to assume an opposition between subjective human experience and objective divine reality.<sup>12</sup> In this way religion achieves its concept and comes to be what it was supposed to be from the beginning: spirit's knowing itself *as spirit*. Spirit is no longer merely *in itself* but also *for itself*; its self-determination is no longer merely an abstract ideal but also a realized truth (*VPR III-m*, pp. 177–79).

In an important way, then, absolute religion rises above the limits that result from finite religious consciousness's symbolic character. At the same time, however, it contains symbolic consciousness within it and relies upon this consciousness for both theoretical and practical purposes. Indeed, according to Hegel, Christianity reveals spirit's infinite subjectivity precisely through its symbolic conception of the trinity, for the trinity illustrates spirit's power to differentiate itself, to create an other, and yet to remain with itself in this otherness (*VPR III-m*, pp. 104–105). Equally important, symbolic consciousness is essential to absolute religion's practice of worship (*VPR III-m*, p. 163–67). Absolute religion incorporates the standpoint of finite religious consciousness into the larger process of its own self-developing, self-differentiating spirit. What this means is that the spirit of absolute religion is at once symbolic and beyond the symbolic. In so far as it resorts to symbolic consciousness, it includes moments of alienation and ambiguity. However, since absolute religion uses symbolic forms that correspond to the structure of the Idea, it inclines its followers to think about the symbols they use and to grasp the difference between their own subjectivity and the divine object represented as part of spirit's whole self-relation. A supersession of finite consciousness thus occurs through religious devotion and reflection. Hegel explains, "The standpoint of consciousness is thus not the only standpoint. The devout person sinks himself into his object with his heart, his devotion, his will; in this way at the peak of worship he supersedes the separation which belongs to the

standpoint of consciousness" (*VPR II-s*, p. 191; *VPR III-m*, p. 102).<sup>13</sup> According to Hegel, the *consciousness* of absolute religion still attributes meaning to immediate expressions that are "other" than it, but its *spirit* comprehends the basis of this attribution and thus marks this otherness as something transitory and inessential.

Still this moment of the symbolic can be considered "inessential" only at the point of spirit's self-return. For, as Hegel himself emphasizes, it is necessary not only that spirit undergo a period of alienation, but also that it *continue* to posit its internal difference (*VPR III-m*, p. 235). As he explains, all knowledge—indeed everything spiritual—first occurs to individuals through external means. Just as the laws of the state come to us externally through teaching and upbringing, so is the truth of absolute religion first known by consciousness in an external way. This truth must be mediated by the authority of teachers, dogma, and ritual before it can be appropriated by each individual (*VPR III-m*, p. 164). Through these mediums spirit reinscribes its otherness over and over again.

Similarly, symbolic consciousness presents spirit with ambiguous representations. However, according to Hegel, since the symbolic forms of absolute religion correspond to the logical Idea, they lend themselves to the discovery of their own limitations. Hegel maintains that the spirit of absolute religion can discern the intended meaning in the midst of the accidental qualities of its symbolic expression. This discernment reduces the symbol's ambiguity to a transitory moment of spirit's whole self-relation. However, as Hegel himself admits, not all elements of absolute religion can be clarified in this way. Spirit continues to create symbolic forms which defy philosophical clarity (*VPR I-m*, pp. 293–94; *VPR II-s*, pp. 311–12). Generally speaking, however, Hegel sees absolute religion as overcoming the limitations intrinsic to finite religious consciousness. In his view, the serious follower of absolute religion will reflect upon the implications of at least its most important symbolic representations; he or she will be able to discern the ground of the symbolic associations and thus transcend

their limitations. But this is not to say that absolute religion could exist without these symbolic forms. For it can distinguish itself from philosophy and assert itself as independently absolute only on the basis of these forms. Without its fundamental symbolic conceptions of the trinity, the historical incarnation of the second person of this trinity, and the sacraments which institute these conceptions into religious practice, absolute religion would not exist at all.

### *B. The Christian Conception of the Trinity*

In Hegel's judgment, of all religious representations, the Christian representation of a triune God who takes on human form in a single historical event best portrays the self-differentiating unity of the human and the divine and best corresponds to the logical structure of the Idea. Just as this Idea begins in abstraction, so too does Christianity represent an abstract God who exists outside of space and time. As Hegel explains, "the abstract God, the father, is the general, the comprehensive one" (*VPR III-m*, p. 128). Then, too, just as the Idea must externalize and differentiate itself, so too must this God create the finite world of human beings. For "God is essentially this: to reveal himself, to be his object";<sup>14</sup> he must extend himself, beyond his abstract isolation and be for an other (*VPR III-m*, p. 130). In Christian terms this is the stage of the Son, of God's becoming fully human in the historical person of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus, Hegel emphasizes, represents "the infinite particularity, the appearance" of the Idea (*VPR III-m*, p. 128). Finally, there is the moment in which the idea returns to itself out of this appearance of otherness. This reconciliation is represented religiously in the third element of the trinity, "spirit"—the unity of the particular and the general as "individual" (*Einzelheit*) (*VPR III-m*, p. 128). In reality this period of differentiation and appearance was its other, but since spirit (the realized Idea) *needs this otherness* in order to become the self-differentiating identity it is supposed to be, this otherness turns out to be at once part of spirit's own self-determining activity. Spirit therefore can recognize this

otherness as something that it *must have presupposed*, something that belongs to its concept. The necessity here is logical, but it is realized concretely in the experience of reconciliation that binds the worshipping community together. In the terms of absolute religion, this is the immanent presence of the Holy Spirit in the Christian community. Ultimately, Hegel believes that Christianity reveals spirit as love—that is, as finding itself in and through a differentiated unity with the other. Hegel remarks, “‘God is love’ is a very fitting expression; since God is in feeling (*Empfindung*); he is thus [a] person, and the relationship is so that the consciousness of one has itself only in the consciousness of the other, he is conscious of himself only in the other” (*VPR III-m*, p. 126).

Although Hegel thematizes neither the symbol nor the sign at this point, his elaboration of the parallels between the trinity and the absolute idea suggest that, in his terms, the trinity *both symbolizes and signifies* the Idea of spirit. On the one hand, in the particularity of its representation, that is, in its use of the images of the father and the son, it *symbolizes* spirit. Hegel makes this point repeatedly: “The relation of father and son is taken out of organic life and is used as a means of representation (*ist Vorstellungsweise gebraucht*): this natural relation is only imaged (*bildlich*) and therefore never totally corresponding to what is supposed to be expressed” (*VPR II-s*, pp. 223, 234; *VPR III-m*, pp. 127–28). The Christian understanding of the trinity takes the natural relation of father and son and attributes to it the meaning of self-determining spirit. As is the case with all symbolic representations, there is a basis for this attribution, but by the same token, there is also a significant difference between the meaning intended and the form that aims to express it. A difference remains between the symbol and the thought. The trinity serves to symbolize the whole range of reality from total immediacy (in the flesh of the particular human being known as Jesus) to infinite subjective freedom (the community in which the Holy Spirit is immanent), but it does not make its meaning completely explicit. It does not identify which of its qualities are essential to its meaning and which

are not. It does not, for example, make it clear whether “father” and “son” could be replaced by “mother” and “daughter.” Nor does it express everything that is true about what it seeks to represent.

In Hegel’s view, there is also a sense in which the trinity *makes its meaning present* and thus transcends the symbolic dimension. As O’Regan observes, Hegel’s understanding of the trinity follows the mystical conceptions of Eckhart and Boehme in its emphasis on the trinity as an *immanent* expression of spirit.<sup>15</sup> According to Hegel, the trinity does not simply point to an other meaning as the symbol does: it also *signifies* the very becoming of the unity of the human and the divine. Therefore, in his view, the specific content of the trinity is to be understood symbolically, but *the structure* of the trinity is to be taken quite literally, for it expresses the identity-in-difference of the human and the divine. In other words, the trinity’s *content* symbolizes, while its *form* signifies, and this difference between form and content is itself necessary to spirit’s act of self-constitution (VPR II-s, p. 228). For Hegel, the conception of God as three intersubjective persons follows from the insight that spirit is freedom; the image of “personality” indicates subjective freedom, the freedom of being at one with oneself in one’s difference. Accordingly, Hegel emphasizes the importance of *the difference* among the three persons: the image of “personality,” he says, indicates “that the opposition is to be taken absolutely, is not so mild” (VPR III-m, p. 127). But this opposition is superseded at the same time: “The true personality is in fact this: to win itself in the sinking and being sunk in the other” (VPR III-m, p. 211). The truth of spirit expressed by the trinity is precisely this unity-in-difference. By differing from spirit with respect to its content and identifying with it in terms of form, the trinity coincides with the self-differentiating structure of spirit. Due to the fact that the trinity’s structure corresponds to the Idea which also necessarily includes a moment of concretion and otherness, the difference between meaning and expression involved in the conception of the trinity actually *enables* the differentiation of spirit to be realized. In other

words, this symbolic representation and the differentiation it entails constitutes its identity with the Idea of spirit. Without this difference the idea would remain a merely abstract unity. Indeed, without this difference it would be impossible to conceive of the historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth as the incarnation of absolute spirit.

### *C. The Christian Conception of the Incarnation*

Like the trinity, the Christian conception of the incarnation *both symbolizes and signifies* the idea of spirit. Through the conception of the incarnation, Jesus's immediate existence as a particular human being comes to represent all of humanity and so gains a meaning not inherent to its immediacy. That spirit takes the form of immediacy or "simple self-relation" is essential to its being, but spirit cannot sustain itself at this level. Spirit is *the activity* of self-knowing, and mere immediacy can support neither a self, nor activity, nor knowledge. This immediacy must move to indicate more general meaning, and in Hegel's opinion, the particularity of the story of Jesus's death and resurrection represents the general meaning of interior conversion, the completion of God, and the elevation of all humans to God (*VPR II-s*, pp. 293–95). Not all of this general meaning is immediately contained in the external story, but, as Hegel suggests, faith attributes this additional meaning to it.

The content . . . is of a completely sensuous nature, that Christ lived in Palestine, etc. But faith (*Glaube*) changes its meaning; specifically, it is not only a matter of faith in the time and this external story, but rather that this human being was God's son. Here the sensuous content becomes a complete other; it is transformed into something else, and the challenge is that this should be believed. The object has changed itself completely from a sensuous, empirically existing [one] into a divine one. . . . This content is no longer anything sensuous, for the transition consists in the supersession of this. (*VPR III-m*, p. 157, translation slightly altered)



Here again, although Hegel indicates that the immediate sensuous element of the historical being of Christ is reduced to a sign of spirit, he acknowledges that the image of the "Son" "is just an image derived from a natural relation"; it is used to represent something to which it bears a limited identity: "we well know that it is not meant in its immediacy, that its meaning is rather a relationship which is only *approximately* this" (*VPR I-s*, pp. 141–42). The immediate being of the person of Jesus indicates a more general meaning through qualities it has in common with this meaning, but it does not capture or comprise the entirety of this meaning. As a *symbol* of spirit, the immediate presence of Jesus falls short of spirit's whole truth. Nor do all of its qualities pertain to this general meaning. For example, while it is important that Jesus be conceived with the particular qualities of physical human being, these particular qualities (hair color, height, gender, etc.) presumably are not relevant to the spiritual meaning of Jesus.

What *is* relevant to the spiritual meaning of Jesus is his sacrifice and death. Jesus's finitude identifies an essential aspect of spirit. For, as Hegel affirms, spirit must become fully finite in order to realize itself. It must take on the form of a finite human being because it must undergo the real loss that is attached to finitude. By confronting finitude in the extreme of Jesus's death, religious consciousness extends itself beyond human limitation and touches the infinity of spirit. But, as Hegel stresses, Jesus's death is not only an immediate, human death, but also the death of the divine that was immanent in this immediacy. The death of Jesus is at once the death of spirit itself—the death of God—and this death is wholly essential to the nature of spirit. Hegel is emphatic with regard to this point: this death "must not merely be represented as the death of this individual, as the death of this sensuous individual," for what is at issue here is "that God himself has died" (*VPR III-m*, p. 150). Not surprisingly, however, this negation has a positive aspect as well: the death of God constitutes the positive possibility of God coming to know himself. Since the divine becomes truly finite in and

through its death, the death of God also means the death of the divine *as something that may be opposed to the human*. And since the divine is only really finite in so far as it opposes itself to the human and holds the human to be other than it, *spirit actually supersedes this finitude exactly as it consummates it*. In Jesus's death, then, the opposition between human and divine is reconciled (VPR III-m, p. 150). In this sense, for Hegel, Jesus is more than a symbol of spirit. Jesus's immediate presence does not just refer or point to this more general meaning; his consciousness of his unity with the divine and his willingness to die actually *make it present*, as the sign makes its meaning present. Jesus's consciousness lets the divine become concretely real instead of merely abstract. Still, even for Hegel, the finite person of Jesus does not make the positive aspect of this negation manifest; this manifestation occurs only through the presence of the Holy Spirit, another person of the trinity, in the community of those who knew Jesus. Therefore, from the point of view of the whole tradition and community, Jesus functions *as a symbol*; he constitutes only a part of the whole of spirit.

#### *D. Community, Tradition, and Interpretation*

In the third domain, the domain of the Holy Spirit, spirit returns to itself out of its experience of otherness. It recognizes its differentiation to be a necessary part of itself, and it realizes that the oppositions it once maintained between divine and human, finite and infinite, subject and object, generality and particularity, are wholly reconcilable. Thus, according to Hegel, the Christian community does not understand its object of worship to be something "other" than itself. Rather, it conceives of the divine as fully immanent in its intersubjective consciousness: "this is the community itself, the existing spirit, spirit in its existence, God existing as community" (VPR III-m, p. 254). In other words, the Christian community is *both* the subject *and* the object of God. Hegel thus emphasizes that God is present and active *in* this world, not above and beyond it (VPR I-m, p. 187).

Here, through his insistence upon the perfect identity of the divine and the human, Hegel seems to suggest that the Christian community *signifies* spirit rather than symbolizes it. Indeed, according to Hegel, the formation of this community occurs in the same way as the sign serves its function: it reduces sensuous immediacy to a transitional, inessential moment of its whole. With respect to the Christian community, this means that the immediate being of Jesus Christ is at once canceled and fulfilled by the entire community that shares his story (*VPR III-m*, pp. 156–57).<sup>16</sup> The formation of the community is “the transition out of the external, of appearance, into the internal” (*VPR III-m*, p. 153). The sensibly present content passes, but it is determined as “eternally belonging to the spiritual nature of God” (*VPR III-m*, p. 154). Through the certainty of their infinite supersensuous existence, each member of the community externalizes his or her particularity and turns it into something mediated by the whole. Only through this means is spirit able to return to itself—that is, to become completely “present” (*gegenwärtig*) and immanent in its community (*VPR III-m*, pp. 155–58).

Nonetheless, Hegel implicitly admits that this spiritual community *symbolizes* spirit, even as it is supposed to make spirit fully present. Hegel claims, for example, that it belongs to the realization of faith that spirit stands opposed to itself in the community’s practice of worship: “The community also [and] essentially has consciousness, representation in dogma, etc., but with this arises (*auftritt*) the separation, the differentiation (*Unterscheidenheit*); the divine objective Idea confronts consciousness as other” (*VPR III-m*, p. 167). For Hegel, then, a certain experience of alienation belongs to the practice of religious devotion. In order for spirit to become the unity of the divine and the human, it must experience and maintain within itself the difference between the two. Interestingly, Hegel even suggests that spirit’s process of self-identification in and through the community does not come with any guarantee, for he expressly notes that spirit seems to run the risk of “losing itself” here (*VPR III-m*, p. 167). There exists the possibility

that religion may deteriorate to the level of mere subjective feeling and not be able to sustain the life of its community (VPR III-m, p. 174).

Hegel also acknowledges the representative and symbolic nature of the teachings of Christ, of the Church, and of the Bible. Each of these, in his opinion, contains a significant degree of ambiguity. The teachings of Christ, when taken merely in themselves, are just for feeling and representing imagination; it is only the life and fate of the individual that transforms the generality of the representation into a concrete reality (VPR II-s, p. 285). Similarly, he maintains that the teaching of the Church is put down in symbols: "In order to remove it from arbitrariness and accidentality of opinion and view, to preserve it as truth that is in and for itself, and as something firm (*ein Festes*) it is laid down in symbols (*wird es in **Symbolen** niedergelegt*)" (VPR II-s, p. 322). Hegel also designates the Bible as symbolic, noting that not all of its passages are authentic and even those that are can be understood in conflicting ways (VPR III-m, p. 160; VPR I-s, pp. 35–36).

In addition to these symbolic elements to which Hegel freely admits, there seems to be another fundamental one, which he would surely deny. It seems, in fact, that the Christian community is best understood as a *symbol* of spirit, rather than as a sign of it. By emphasizing the importance of this shared story of Christ, Hegel defines this community as those who share certain traditions, convictions, and patterns of worship. In so doing, he obviously excludes most members of the human community. Therefore, when he designates the community as a sign of the divine, he commits the same fallacy he accuses Jewish religious consciousness of committing: he assumes that an all-powerful God would choose a single, finite community. By Hegel's own logic, it seems, therefore, that the best this community can hope to be is a *symbol* of spirit. In response to this criticism, Hegel would probably insist that the Christian community is open to anyone who sees its truth and that the fact that not everyone is Christian is simply a mistake on the part of those who do not choose it. Yet this

insistence derives from the assumption that only Christianity adequately presents the truth of spiritual freedom, an assumption founded upon the circular logic of Hegel's concept, and certainly objectionable from the point of view of other traditions. Thus, even if Hegel's notion of spirit has a certain kind of necessity, his *historical application of it* seems deeply influenced by his own personal religious background. Similarly, his contention that the particular content of Christian representation guards against the dangers involved in symbolic forms is deeply problematic, not to mention historically untenable. As James Yerkes points out, there can be no doubt that "Hegel's general theory of religion is methodologically *and* historically dependent upon its christological convictions."<sup>17</sup>

Hegel also fails to consider the concrete fact that throughout history there have been repeated, fundamental conflicts and disagreements within this Christian community. To be sure, he identifies modern German Lutheranism as the 'real' community of spirit, but he does not consider that even within this group there are many different interpretations of spirit. Hegel seems to respond to this concern in a partial way when he insists that the multiplicity of the individuals in the community is only an appearance (*VPR II-s*, pp. 303–304), but, by his own terms, such "appearance" also has a definitive kind of reality. Nor does Hegel consider whether the community's absolute spirit may permit it to act against moral imperatives or whether the community runs the risk of acting against the truth of its spirit. By definition, the community in which absolute spirit is present transcends the level of objective spirit, morality, and ethics, but Hegel certainly does not mean to suggest that the community leaves this level behind. Therefore, the question of *whose* morality or ethics necessarily arises. Hegel's solution can be nothing but the arbitration of philosophy, which he says can recognize when religion is one-sided or reductive (*VPR I-s*, p. 54). Needless to say, unless one sees the necessity Hegel claims his philosophy has, this response merely transforms the question of 'whose ethics?' into 'whose philosophy?'

Clearly, the value of Hegel's philosophy of religion does not lie in his particular interpretations of various religions. But all too often the shortcomings of Hegel's philosophy, particularly his philosophy of religion, have led readers to dismiss it completely. This is unfortunate since it does actually have much to teach us. Chief among what is valuable in Hegel's religion philosophy, as we have already indicated, is the way in which it contributes to his general conception of spirit as the self-creating, self-differentiating unity of the human and the divine. Equally important, however, is Hegel's general insistence upon both *the necessity of representation*, and *the need to think through the representations given to us*, regardless of what they are. Only in this way can they become our *own*. Only in this way can they be transformed from something *imposed upon* us to something *determined by* us. To use Hegel's terminology: only this way does spirit's abstract being *in itself* become *for itself* and free.

#### IV. The Human, the Divine, and the Symbolic

##### A. *The Need for the Symbolic*

As we have seen, Hegel maintains that all religions, whether finite or absolute, use symbolic representation. Finite religions are simply less aware of their use of it than absolute religion, and, for this reason, they suffer to a greater degree under the limitation of this representational form. Absolute religion, by contrast, consciously acknowledges both the necessity and limitation of this form. It maintains this form's positive advantages by recognizing its necessity, and it rises above its limitations by subjecting it to philosophical thought.

Ultimately then, for Hegel, the symbolic representations of even absolute religion can gain their full meaning only through philosophy, and it is the task of philosophy to transform the content of religious representation into the form of thought—that is, to discover reason in religion

(VPR I-m, pp. 235, 175). What this means is that religious representation, in Hegel's view, is limited with respect to the entire truth of spirit. But it does *not* mean that Hegel sees thought as more essential to religion than its symbolic representations, as some scholars of Hegel's philosophy of religion have suggested. Lauer, for example, maintains the absolute status of religion, but sees this as grounded in religion's tendency toward thought. Not only does he insist on interpreting "*Vorstellung*" (representation) in the direction of conceptual understanding, thereby minimizing its connection with the sensuous, but he also understands spirit exclusively in terms of thought.<sup>18</sup> As a result, though he acknowledges the need for God to reveal himself in the symbols of religion, he insists that God is thoroughly beyond the sensible and "can be the object of reason only."<sup>19</sup> To be sure, Hegel does claim that God cannot be fully present to the form of consciousness that has representations: "Sensuous reflecting consciousness is not that for which God as God can be, that is, according to his eternal being in and for itself essence (*Wesenheit*)—his appearance is something else, this is for sensuous consciousness. . . . He is thus essentially for thought" (VPR III-m, p. 123). To the reality of God belongs a certain generality which only thought is capable of grasping (VPR I-s, p. 95). But from this consideration, one must not conclude that *representations* of God are any less important to spirit's whole reality. Part of what misleads Lauer is his primary identification of spirit with a God that must reveal himself and his corresponding neglect of the human element of spirit's self-creation.<sup>20</sup> In Hegel's view, what religion calls God can only come to be in and through human activity; it *is* only in so far as it manifests itself, and it must manifest itself in and through the human. Without the human dimension of emotions and sensuous feeling (as well as understanding and thought), God cannot move out of the realm of mere abstraction. God can—indeed *must*—be represented in symbolic forms because this is the mode of his *appearance* and only by appearing can the divine *be for an other* (i.e., for the human) and thus develop *itself* as spirit. Indeed, by Hegel's defini-

tion, appearing for an other means, first of all, to be in sensuous form: "What is for an other is in a sensuous (*sinnliche*) way." (VPR I-m, p. 231). In order for spirit to be realized, "it must be represented as something historical, as something that is completed on earth, in appearance" (VPR III-m, p. 252–53). This is why Hegel's conception of religion involves "the essentially absolute return" (*die wesentlich absolute Rückkehr*) of sensuous representation (VPR III-m, p. 153). O'Regan seems to acknowledge this point, noting that "representation is infiltrated by image," and arguing for "the ultimate perdurance" of religious narrative within philosophy.<sup>21</sup> But while he denies that philosophy makes religious representation obsolete, he nonetheless focuses on the ways in which representation moves away from the sensible dimension and becomes assimilated by philosophy.<sup>22</sup> (His emphasis on "narrative" as opposed to the symbolic is symptomatic of this.) Consequently, he does not sufficiently stress either religion's independent absolute status or the value of precisely *the finite* elements of the symbolic for spirit's development. But for Hegel the spirit of religion has an absolute need for symbolic representation in religion, and this need derives from the very nature of spirit as self-developing and self-differentiating. Spirit must be and appear as finite, as outside of itself, as symbolic. This is true whether spirit is viewed from the divine or the human side. Hegel asserts, "God as spirit is essentially this: to be for an other, that is, to reveal himself" (VPR III-m, p. 105); "to God as spirit belongs the *appearance* (*das Erscheinen*) as human, otherwise he is not spirit" (VPK 1823, p. 158). And to this appearance belongs a kind of limitation; spirit as divine becomes external to spirit as human, and spirit as human conceives a distance between itself and the divine spirit. This is necessary if spirit is to be, to become, at all. God must appear and this means that he must differentiate himself: "A not-appearing God is an abstraction. The essential moment is to differentiate oneself (*sich zu unterscheiden*) and so with this an other (*ein Anderes*) is posited" (VPR I-m, p. 229). To be sure, as Derrida points out, this



“otherness” reveals itself as part of spirit’s eternal movement and process (VPR III-*m*, p. 105). It is a relative other. But this relativity does not detract from its *being* other: it is what *constitutes* it as such. The relativity of the other defines it as *genuinely* other. Otherness is an intrinsically relative concept (WL I, pp. 125–31).

Religious representation is just as indispensable from the human point of view. According to Hegel, it is “absolutely necessary” that religious teaching be given in the form of representation. Although he sees religious representation as especially required for ordinary consciousness (VPR III-*m*, p. 209), he maintains that it is necessary for all humans. In his view, it is through the representations provided by faith that the individual becomes filled with the divine spirit (VPR III-*m*, pp. 254, 163). Although absolute religion involves an element of thought, Hegel maintains that human beings may not be reduced to mere thinking consciousness (VPR III-*m*, p. 123). Even if a given representation may be judged as accidental and inessential to spirit’s meaning, the *form* of representation is necessary to its manifestation in the existential lives of human beings (VPR I-*s*, pp. 15, 32–33). Specifically, in Hegel’s view, human beings need to come to know the divine through symbolic rituals such as the sacrament of baptism and the Holy Eucharist. Besides allowing the individual to be filled by spirit in his emotional being, these symbols contribute to the formation and perseverance of the religious community (VPR III-*m*, pp. 163–67).

Furthermore, as we will see in the next chapter, Hegel believes that the task of thinking through religious representations is essential to their meaning. Philosophy must first encounter the form of representation in order to go beyond it; it *needs* the content of representation (VPR III-*m*, p. 175). Moreover, just as the abstract idea of spirit needs to concretize itself in human form, so does thought need to be exemplified. As Hegel notes, it can happen that a thought determination is not manifest *until* an example is given. In this case spirit *first* becomes present through the example that *re-presents* it (VPR I-*s*, pp. 32–33).

In Hegel's philosophy, then, religious spirit becomes absolute only *through the finite form of representation*, that is, *through the symbolic mediation of spirit*. The need for symbolization arises on two apparently opposed accounts. It serves, most obviously, to establish a connection between spirit's finite and infinite, human and divine, general and particular dimensions. At the same time, however, since this connection can be established by the symbol only partially, the symbol also constitutes a limited mode of spiritual identification. Yet this limitation *per se* is essential to spirit's ultimate self-mediation because spirit has the need to appear as other, to undergo the alienation of finitude, to develop its own internal difference. Symbolic representation is thus not the mere condition of the possibility of spirit coming to know itself; it is not something that spirit can simply leave behind. Rather, its form and the difference inherent to its structure comprise a basic part of spirit's self-constitution. That is to say, the difference intrinsic to the symbol remains *within* spirit as part of its act of self-identification. Logically speaking, there can be no self-identifying spirit that does not also contain and bear difference within it (WL II, pp. 35–60).<sup>23</sup> Hegel expresses this philosophical point in religious terms when he asserts that God brings himself and the world forth *eternally*. He is never “finished” but “eternally” posits an other to which he may appear (VPR III-m, p. 200). Yet the “other” of God—the human—does not remain absolutely other: through acts of symbolization as well as reflection, human subjectivity comes to identify itself with the divine in the ultimate unity of absolute spirit.

### *B. The Unity of the Human and the Divine*

As we saw in the introduction to this book, most commentators on Hegel have chosen to emphasize *either* the human *or* the divine dimension of spirit. Hegel's philosophy of religion discredits both of these positions and makes it clear that his notion of spirit is the complete, differentiated unity of the two sides (see, for example, VPR III-m, p. 254). While he acknowledges that from the point of view of finite

religious consciousness, the object of religion necessarily appears as having been constituted outside the realm of human experience, Hegel insists that such an opposition between the human and the divine cannot be sustained. Spirit is the continual act of reconciling the two, uniting both without denying or destroying their difference. Spirit is the self-constituting unity of the divine and the human, where subjectivity and objectivity, finitude and infinity, belong to both sides alike (*VPR-III-m*, pp. 101, 107). For Hegel, then, what is truly and properly human—human freedom brought about through the self-determining power of reason—is only in and through the divine; human beings are part of the consciousness of God and they only overcome their finitude in their return to God (*VPR III-m*, p. 99). But, by the same token, what is truly divine—concrete determination in and through one's other—is only in and through the human. Not only is the divine finite in so far as it opposes itself to the human, but the human is infinite and capable of creating itself in the form of the spiritual community. Indeed, the human-divine unity is so intimate that, according to Hegel, one makes a grave mistake if one tries to ascertain which elements of spirit pertain to the human and which to the divine (*VPR III-m*, p. 165). Ultimately, then, religion serves to express this identity, but it does so precisely in terms of the difference involved. Because consciousness is an essential aspect of spirit, the difference between the human and the divine remains constitutive of this unity: "In so far as spirit differentiates itself, the finitude of consciousness steps in. The consciousness of spirit, for which it is, is finite consciousness. But finite consciousness is a moment of absolute spirit itself; [absolute spirit] is the self-differentiating, the self-determining, that is, the self-positing as finite consciousness" (*VPR-I-m*, p. 222; see also *VPR I-s*, p. 197). As the act of self-identification, spirit occupies itself with its internal difference. "Spirit is this process, movement, life. This life is to differentiate itself, to determine itself" (*VPR III-m*, p. 201). "That which lives has needs and is thus contradiction, but satisfaction is the supersession of this contradiction. In drives, needs, I am dif-

ferent from myself. But life is this: to dissolve (*aufzulösen*) this contradiction, to satisfy needs, to bring it to peace, but so that the contradiction arises again; [life] is the alternation of difference, of contradiction, and its supersession" (*VPR III-m*, p. 207). Unable to exist (that is, to be what its concept supposes it to be), without manifesting itself in an "other," the spirit of absolute religion never ceases to concretize itself in symbolic forms.

Spirit's absoluteness thus involves essential moments of difference, division, and lack of clarity. It is true that for Hegel these moments in which spirit is outside of itself are transitory and relative to spirit's ultimate process of reconciliation. What appears as other is never an absolute other, but an other that belongs to spirit's own integrity (*VPR I-m*, p. 222; *ENZ III*, §377, Zus.). The "other" stands in relation to spirit and ultimately serves to strengthen its identity. This is why, for Derrida, such "difference" remains unimpressive. But the fact that Derrida describes human existence as ultimately finite and different (i.e., "differing" and "deferring") from that which may be conceived as transcendent presupposes an *absolute* difference between the two dimensions. Yet, if the difference were absolute, there could be no contact between the domains. It would be impossible for the divine to be manifest to humans and there would be no human testimony to such manifestation. Though one might argue against the asserted truths of religion (that the divine truly exists and manifests itself), the phenomenon of religion, of the human testimony to the divine, cannot be denied. This phenomenon—the very appearance—suffices to show that the divine and the human are at least subjectively connected. Their difference is not absolute. The finitude of human beings confronts an infinite beyond. And this infinite ceases to be a "bad" one, as soon as it is given symbolic form. It ceases to be absolutely other as soon as it becomes manifest in a finite configuration, as soon as human beings seek to find a fitting place for it.

Hegel's assertion that absolute spirit has no absolute other need not be viewed, then, as a claim about an all-consuming, all-appropriating, "monstrous" spirit. To be sure,

Hegel's concept of spirit is limited by some dangerous cultural and religious prejudices, for he evaluates foreign cultures with an eye to asserting the superiority of his own. But this obvious shortcoming should not blind us to the philosophical value of his conception of a self-creating, self-differentiating spirit. For, as we have seen over and over again, Hegel conceives of a spirit that is—that *has* to be—open to difference. In order for this spirit to *be*, in order for it to be *spirit*, it must be and *appear as other* than itself. True, as Derrida reminds us, this very process of differentiation is “always already” part of its self-identification and realization. But *equally* this identification and realization is always already divided, differentiating, manifesting itself in and as an other. Spirit finds itself—and this is the point that only speculative thinking can grasp—only in so far as it is beyond itself, manifesting itself in an other form. Precisely because spirit is the unification of the human and the divine, it is equally the difference, the symbolic space, between them.

## Chapter Five



### The Process of Philosophy and Spirit's Symbolic Mediation

So far we have seen a number of ways in which theoretical and absolute spirit have recourse to the symbolic. Although the intelligence's move to thought requires it to conceive of pure signs, its construction of the sign arises out of its use of symbols. Moreover, the purity of thought mediated by the sign turns out to be only formal. Spirit must move on to develop itself in the practical and objective dimensions of reality (namely, in subjective desire and the ethical community) and then return to acts of symbolization in art and religion. These two forms of the absolute reveal spirit to be deeply involved in its symbolic mediation. Absolute spirit turns out to contain experiences of alienation in which it does not wholly know itself or comprehend its other. Its being as absolute includes the experience of knowing itself *not* knowing, knowing itself as opposed to *an other*, knowing itself not knowing *itself* completely.

The question remains, however, to what extent this ambiguous, self-alienated aspect of spirit is superseded and nullified by the thought of philosophy. Is philosophy capable of establishing its own ground? Or does it remain dependent upon its sensuous other, as Derrida suggests? Does spirit's realization in philosophy raise it above its symbolic dimension or does the symbolic play a role even in philosophical discourse? In this chapter we will try to come to terms with Hegel's somewhat paradoxical position with regard to these questions. For Hegel is clear in his assertion that philosophy,

like spirit, contains its ground within itself; yet he also comprehends philosophy as standing in relation to the symbolic forms of art and religion in such a way that it cannot be complete without them. To the “mere understanding” this may seem to be a contradiction, but as we shall see, Hegel’s claim that philosophy can determine its own ground in abstraction from the sensuous and from the symbolic forms of art and religion need not be seen as precluding or denying its essential recourse to these fields.

## I. Philosophy and the Symbol

### A. *The Transparency of Thought: Philosophy, Logic, and Truth*

At the beginning of his *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences* (*Enzyklopädie der Philosophischen Wissenschaften*), Hegel offers a preliminary definition of philosophy as the “*thinking consideration* (***denkende Betrachtung***) of objects” (*ENZ I*, §2). In contrast to art, which lets truth appear in a sensuous form, and religion, which represents the truth, philosophy expresses the truth *in the form of thought* (*des Denkens*). As we have seen, art and religion obscure the truth to some extent even while they reveal it; like the symbol, they point to something “more” than what they themselves can clearly communicate. For Hegel, however, philosophical thought expresses itself clearly and completely by employing signs, which enable it to disregard accidental meanings and to focus only on intended ones. Unlike art and religion, which express the truth symbolically, philosophy’s form corresponds to the truth so perfectly that its very process *is* the truth. In other words, instead of merely presenting or representing the truth, philosophy *proves or demonstrates* it (*ENZ I*, §4; *VGP I*, p. 113.).

Against more common conceptions of truth as the correspondence between things and our representations of them, Hegel contends that a thing or a statement is true when it agrees with its *concept*—that is, when it is what it

is supposed to be in light of the whole of reality. For example, as Hegel explains, "a true friend" is not someone who presents him or herself as a true friend, but someone *who really is* what a friend is supposed to be (*ENZ I*, §24, Zus. 2).<sup>1</sup> However, this correspondence which defines truth is hardly a simple one. In order to know the ultimate truth of any one thing, we must know not only how it stands in relation to its particular concept, but also how its concept stands in relation to "the" concept, the one general concept of reality (*WL I*, pp. 29–30). In order to know the truth, we must know "the whole": we must be able to recognize the limitations of every finite thing, principle, and apparent contradiction and grasp the systematic coherence of reality. According to Hegel, however, the true or the whole is that which "has the urge to *develop*" (*LHP*, p. 20). "The true is the whole," Hegel says, but the whole is "the essence completing itself through its development" (*PG*, §20). What is true or whole is that which is self-determining and free, that which has its ground within itself. What is true or whole is absolute "spirit."

For Hegel philosophy is the most appropriate form for the expression of spirit because it, too, has its ground within itself. As the fundamental science, philosophy is not subject to any necessity outside of itself. It is *its own* ground and it has *its own* necessity. Or, more accurately, through the process of its development, it *generates* its own ground and necessity. Philosophy, in other words, can fully account for itself; it is self-positing, self-developing, and self-determining. It accomplishes this unique feat, according to Hegel, by beginning with the science of logic. In all the other sciences, the object of study is something other than the method, but in logic the content and the method are one and the same (*WL I*, p. 35). "Logic is the science of *the pure idea*, that is of the idea in the abstract element of *thought*" (*ENZ I*, §19). Whereas philosophy includes the "thinking consideration" of the concrete objects of spirit and nature, logic concerns itself only with the formal elements of thought (*WL I*, p. 23). Hegel makes it clear that these thought determinations are not ultimately separable



from their content (*WL I*, pp. 26–30, 44–45), but he maintains that by training in speculative logic one learns the proper way to study other objects. Through logic one learns how to comprehend “laws” and “general principles” (*WL I*, p. 55; *ENZ I*, §7). While the understanding tends to view concepts in opposition to each other, the philosopher trained in logic discerns the general law that reconciles the apparent contradictions and comes to see the larger, unified “whole.” Whereas the understanding fixes upon the difference involved in reciprocal thought determinations, reason recognizes how these apparently conflicting determinations actually *complement* each other. For example, the understanding assumes the finite and infinite, immediate and mediating, sensuous and spiritual, divine and human to be irreconcilable binary oppositions, but philosophy perceives their underlying connection. Not insignificantly, Hegel appeals to metaphor at this point. Philosophical reason, he says, realizes that the fruit does not oppose or nullify the seed but rather brings it to its fruition. As he explains, philosophy recognizes that the seed and the fruit are both “moments of the organic unity, wherein they not only do not oppose each other, but one is as necessary as the other, and this same necessity first constitutes the life of the whole” (*PG*, p. 12). According to Hegel, “The highest truth, the truth as such, is the resolution (*die Auflösung*) of the highest oppositions and contradictions” and “To grasp this concept of the truth is the task of philosophy” (*Ä I*, pp. 137–38). Philosophy’s aim is thus to demonstrate the necessary relations among various things, their concepts, and “the whole.” This implies, of course, that philosophy has access to the whole and is capable of discerning the essentiality of things.

However, at the beginning of its self-determining process, thought does not have transparent access to itself. Rather, it finds itself commingled with intuition, representation, desire, and will (*WL I*, p. 23). Ordinary consciousness mixes thoughts with these other elements without recognizing thought as unique in its comprehensiveness (*ENZ I*, §3). As Hegel remarks, philosophical knowledge re-

quires more than ordinary consciousness: it must "make thought itself, unmixed, into the object," and free it from all confusing accidentality (*WL I*, p. 23; *ENZ I*, §3). Philosophy's task therefore begins with the "isolation" of thought (*das Denken*) or the transformation of sensuous images and representations into thoughts (*ENZ I*, §20). Philosophy places the world of sensation and representation "aside" (*zur Seite*) and concerns itself "solely with itself" (*VGP I*, p. 98; *LHP*, p. 66). As Hegel explains, "The presentation (*Darstellung*) of the concept in the sensuous way always contains an inappropriateness; the ground of imagination (*der Boden der Phantasie*) cannot express the Idea in a true way" (*VGP I*, p. 103). Intuition and representation cannot express the whole truth of thought's transparency because they are tied up with the sensuous and depend upon particular occasions or occurrences; their particular presentations of content are not true in and of themselves, not necessarily true (*ENZ I*, §20). These forms of expression do not explicate their own grounds; they do not communicate *why* their content is the way it is. In short, they do not *account for themselves* in the way that thought does. Allowing for a meaningful difference between their mode of presentation and the necessity of their content, they may be interpreted *symbolically*. Thought, by contrast, is "the self-revealing" (*das sich Offenbarende*) (*VGP I*, p. 109); it is "explicitly its own significance and meaning" (*LHP*, p. 66). It has no meaning other than itself. "In thought there is no longer any difference between ideas or pictures and their meaning; thought is its own meaning and in its existence it is what it is implicitly" (*LHP*, p. 39).

Thus, in Hegel's view, philosophical thought explicates the ambiguity involved in symbols and symbolic representations. By making these its object, it comes to recognize the basis and limitations of the identities they seek to assert. In other words, philosophy puts symbolic representation *into question*. It points out the limit of the identification the symbol indicates and disrupts the understanding's fixation upon the given immediacy. As Hegel says, philosophy replaces representations with concepts: "In that the determinacies of

feeling, of intuition, of desire, of will, etc. in so far as they are *known* are called representations (*Vorstellungen*) in general, it can in general be said that philosophy puts *thoughts*, *categories*, but more accurately *concepts* in the place of representations" (*ENZ I*, §3). In executing its task of comprehending the whole and thinking the unity of opposites, philosophy, or speculative thought, "tear[s] itself away" from the immediacy of representation (*WL I*, pp. 52–53). It does not "delete" or "cancel" this immediacy, but it gains a kind of distance from it. Through this distance spirit becomes able to put it into a larger perspective and to see it as merely a *part* of its *whole* activity.

In this sense, then, philosophy overcomes the ambiguity of the symbolic. It gains a certain, absolute clarity within its own sphere. It can, as Hegel says, "think itself thinking"; it knows itself to have defined its thoughts and to have comprehended their ground. This does not mean, however, that philosophy rises above all need of the symbolic and its association with the sensuous. Philosophy does not wipe out immediacy *per se*: it *makes it* something mediated; it adds a dimension to it. Nor does philosophy get rid of the accidental: it recognizes the accidental to be a necessary part of a larger whole. It comes to see the accidental *as necessary* to its whole self-mediating process. In other words, it comes to see the sensuous other not as its precondition, but as constituting part of its own field of activity.

### *B The Double Meaning of Meaning*

Indeed, as Hegel explicitly admits and as his own use of symbolic images attests, philosophy's pursuit of meaning is intrinsically tied up with representational forms. Not only does philosophy gain its content from the symbolic fields of art and religion, but it itself has recourse to symbolic conceptions. In fact, as Hegel confesses in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* (*Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*), philosophy's discernment of meaning is permeated by a certain duplicity: the meaning of meaning may mean two conflicting things. As he observes, "When we ask:

what does this or that mean? Two different things are asked for, and indeed two opposed things”:

First we call that which we mean the sense, the purpose, the general thought of an expression, an artwork, etc.; we are asking for the interior. This is what we want to bring to representation (*Vorstellung*): it is *thought* (*der Gedanke*). Thus when we ask: what is God? what does the expression God mean?, we want the thought; indeed we already have the representation. Accordingly, it has the meaning that the concept (*Begriff*) should be stated, and thus the *concept* is the meaning [of meaning]. (*VPR I-s*, p. 32)

In one sense, then, the meaning of meaning is the concrete concept of a representation. Here philosophy's job is to discern the basis and limitation of the representation. Where the representation is vague, philosophy must substitute concrete determinations. Nevertheless, as Hegel notes, when we ask what something means, we might also be looking for something completely different from the defined concept of that object:

When we begin from pure thought determinations and not from the representation, it can be that spirit does not satisfactorily find itself in it, is not at home in it and asks what this pure thought determination has to mean. This is the case, for example, with the determinations of the unity of the subjective and the objective, of unity of the real and the ideal: one can understand and know each of these, unity, objectivity, subjectivity, in themselves and indeed one can still say that one does not understand these determinations. When we ask [for the meaning] in such a case, the meaning is the opposite as before. What is demanded here, namely, is a representation of the thought determination, an example of the content (*ein Beispiel des Inhalts*), which has of yet only been given in thought. When we find a thought determination difficult, the difficulty thus lies in that we do not have any representation of it; through the example, it becomes clear to us such that spirit only then becomes present in this content. (*VPR I-s*, pp. 32–33)

In such cases when we already have an articulated concept of a thing, we might still ask what this articulation means. In this situation the “meaning of meaning”—what we are actually looking for—is a representation that can make the articulated concept understandable. In this way representation serves a pedagogical function; it explains the meaning of an already given concept. As Hegel says, “from speculative heights one goes down . . . to easier things that may be represented” (*Vorstellbares*) (*VGP I*, p. 109). Sometimes Hegel implies that this explication is a mere repetition of a meaning already given, that is, something superfluous to one who can grasp the concept. For example, he speaks of the symbolic form of myth in this way: “Once the thoughts are strong enough in themselves, to give themselves in the element of thought, myth is a superficial accessory (*ein überflüssiger Schmuck*) which does not demand philosophy” (*VGP I*, p. 109).

However, Hegel also notes that in some cases the representation or example is completely essential to that which it represents; in these cases the representation or example is what first lets spirit become present. As Malcolm Clark notes, for Hegel, representation “is not simply ‘below’ thought as a level which can be passed and forgotten. . . . [It] is the ‘other’ of thought and yet is ‘interior’ to it.”<sup>2</sup> To be sure, Hegel even admits that the similarity between some representations and thoughts is so great that it is difficult to distinguish the two (*ENZ I*, §20). Representation is inadequate without thought, but thought is also inadequate without representation.<sup>3</sup> Both are essential parts of “the whole” truth. Accordingly, Hegel’s reference to the need to “visualize the movement” of spirit’s process of self-determination in terms of development seems to confess that “development” is a metaphorical conception upon which his concept of philosophy depends.: “The infinite nature of spirit is its inner process of not resting, of essentially producing, and of existing by means of its production. We come closer to understanding this movement by regarding it as development: the concrete as active is essentially self-developing” (*LHP*, p. 70). Indeed, Hegel expresses his very

concept of philosophy in terms of metaphor: as “the highest flowering” (*die höchste Blüte*) of spirit (*VGP I*, p. 73), the process of philosophy is nonetheless a “circle” that opens out into the domains of art and religion (*ENZ I*, §15). Even in the culmination of his systematic thought in his *Enzyklopädie*, Hegel admits the necessity to resort to “representation” (*Vorstellung*); his encyclopedic presentation of his system cannot escape the necessity of presenting its parts “next to each other” even though they actually form an integrated whole (*ENZ I*, §18). Moreover, Hegel’s use of metaphors in his own discourse—the seed that becomes the fruit, for example—further attests to philosophy’s dependence upon the sensuous.<sup>4</sup> In all of these ways, Hegel seems to admit that the abstraction involved in philosophy can only be explicated completely through the use of representational means.

Yet while Hegel seems to allow that philosophy needs metaphors, he also insists that it uses its metaphors in a controlled fashion. It chooses and designs its metaphors and it explicates their meaning within its own field. Here Derrida is correct to point out that philosophy cannot account for the ultimate root of all of its metaphors. Philosophy’s clarification is only relative; it is valid only for those who enter its domain with a willingness to abstract from sensuous immediacy and follow the *Wissenschaft der Logik*, where Hegel purports to have made philosophy’s terminology thoroughly explicit. Here is not the place to judge Hegel’s success in this regard. But the very fact that there is disagreement on the point shows that the possibility of such clarity depends upon the standpoint of the readers as well as that of the writer. As Derrida point out, some elements of thought’s negativity may escape the philosopher, and, more importantly, the very ability *to mean* is contingent upon one’s language community. It is not just a question of logical necessity, but also of the vicissitudes of language.

Nevertheless, as we shall see in the following sections, although Hegel insists upon philosophy’s ability to establish its own ground, he does admit that it is limited with respect to art and religion (*ENZ I*, §15). Philosophy needs these

forms because it draws its content from them and because it cannot accomplish the functions they accomplish. Hegel suggests, for example, that philosophy can explicate the truth of the *Divine Comedy*, but he also maintains that it *cannot* do so without losing something essential to spirit in the process. Philosophy's explication loses the *power* of the religious and artistic images that also belong to spirit. These representing, symbolic elements appeal to human emotion and subjectivity and thus serve to constitute a fundamental aspect of spirit. Therefore, though Hegel does not acknowledge the full extent to which philosophy may be subject to the ambiguity of metaphor, he does acknowledge philosophy's inability to circumscribe its own field absolutely when he admits of its need for art and religion. Moreover, even though Hegel conceives of philosophy as superseding the symbolic dimensions of art and religion and so understands art and religion as more preliminary parts of spirit's self-determination, he emphasizes that this whole *process* of self-determination is absolutely essential to the result. The limitations involved in spirit's symbolic mediation turn out to be integral to its *ultimate* realization.

## II. Philosophy in Relation to Art and Religion

### A. *Philosophy's Comprehension of Art and Religion*

As we have already noted, Hegel understands art, religion, and philosophy each to unite spirit with its "other" and so to have "the whole" as their content (*VGP I*, p. 2; *Ä I*, p. 139). Through each of these forms, spirit brings its defining act of self-knowledge into existence. It recognizes that which first appeared to be "other" than it (i.e., other than its self-defining activity) as a part of itself or a product of its own activity. Through art, religion, and philosophy spirit reconciles itself with what at first seemed to be external to it and thus comprehends itself as "whole" or "absolute." In each of these spheres, spirit raises itself above "the restricting limits of its existence (*den beengenden Schranken seines*

*Daseins*) . . . to the consideration and completion of its being in and for itself" (*Ä I*, p. 131).

Art, religion, and philosophy differ, however, in the ways in which they bring this "whole" to consciousness (*Ä I*, p. 139). As the sensible presentation of the idea, art communicates the truth through intuition and sensation (*Anschauung und Empfindung*); religious consciousness represents or conceives the truth as something external to finite subjectivity; and philosophy demonstrates it through systematic thought (*Ä I*, pp. 139, 143; *VGP I*, p. 88). Art reconciles spirit in the realm of the sensuous; religion includes this kind of reconciliation and adds the internal dimension of devotion and worship; and philosophy then reconciles the elements of representation and worship that religion contains but cannot unify (*VGP I*, p. 97):

Philosophy thinks, comprehends, what religion represents as the object of consciousness, whether it be as a work of the imagination (*Phantasie*) or as historical existence. In religious consciousness the form of knowing of the object is one that belongs to representation [and] contains more or less the sensible. God created his son—, in philosophy we would not express this in this way. . . . In that philosophy thinks its object it has the advantage that what in religion is a different moment, in philosophy is in unity. (*VGP I*, p. 97)

Philosophy thus enacts the most complete reconciliation of spirit. To be sure, in art and religion, spirit reconciles its various apparently conflicting aspects: the finite and infinite, the sensuous and mental, divine and human, immediate and mediate. But art and religion perform this reconciliation only to a limited degree. They have the perfect unity of these opposites as their content, but their forms are not able to *show* this perfect unity. For this reason their form and content fall asunder: art and religion present their content *as something other* than the spirit that intuitively and represents them. They are, as we have seen, essentially symbolic. Consequently, even though art actually entails a high degree of spiritual mediation, the objective immediacy



of its form can too easily be mistaken for something detached from the subjectivity that creates and views it. Even though art intends to be “about” absolute spirit, it may *appear* to be something that is simply there, without spiritual meaning. Similarly, religion means to express the unity of finite and infinite spirit, but its representational form suggests a tension between these two aspects. By projecting the infinite outside the domain of finite subjectivity, religious representation works against its own intention. Instead of perfectly uniting the subjectivity and objectivity of spirit, art and religion tend too much to one side or the other. But according to Hegel, philosophy unites “the *objectivity* of art” and “the *subjectivity* of religion.” In philosophy the objectivity of art loses its external sensibility and takes the form of thought, while the subjectivity of religion is “purified” by the generality of thought (*Ä I*, pp. 143–44). Philosophy’s form is thus both the most objective and the most subjective, the most particular and the most general. The *value* of the content of art and religion equals that of philosophy, but philosophy constitutes the most clear and comprehensive presentation of the truth. Philosophy can conceive the particularity of the forms of art and religion, but these forms cannot comprehend the particularity of philosophy (*Ä I*, pp. 40–43; *VGP I*, p. 101).

### *B. Spirit’s Need to be in an other Form*

Hegel’s preference for the clarity of philosophy over the ambiguity involved in art and religion does not, however, detract from his insistence upon the absolute necessity of these two forms. In fact he is as clear about the necessity of art and religion as he is about the limitations of their forms. Although Hegel conceives of philosophical thought as rising above the sensuous and the symbolic through its construction of the sign, he also acknowledges that philosophical thought arises out of the symbolic associations of religious and artistic imagination and so remains dependent upon them for its content. More importantly, perhaps, despite his insistence that philosophy is perfectly adequate to the true expression of absolute spirit, he admits that it

too has its limits (*Schranke*). "Every part of philosophy is a philosophical whole, a self-enclosing circle," but this circle "breaks through" (*durchbricht*), he says, because philosophy contains "the limits of its own element" (*ENZ I*, §15). It is the highest expression of truth, and it contains the *thoughtful* expression of the content of art and religion, but it cannot convey the truth in the specific ways that art and religion do. Philosophy clarifies the content of art and religion, *but it does not assume their forms*. It can conceptualize beauty, but it cannot let beauty appear as such. It can comprehend the meaning of religion, but it cannot inspire the imagination and emotions in the way that religion can. Philosophy's form of thought penetrates all of the other elements of spirit and serves as their ground of explanation, but it does not usurp the activity or particular effectiveness of the other absolute forms. According to Hegel, even when human beings come to comprehend the limits of art and religion, they do not cease to need the particularity of these forms. Once one has reached the level of philosophy, one's *idea* of spirit and of truth can no longer be enhanced by art or religion, but one's imagination and emotions *can* be nourished by these forms. For this reason, Hegel describes the various elements of his system as interdependent circles: "the whole therefore portrays itself (*stellt sich . . . dar*) as a circle of circles each of which is a necessary moment, so that the system of its own element constitutes the whole idea, which just as much appears in every singularity" (*ENZ I*, §15).

Philosophy thus remains indebted to art and religion on account of the fact that their forms differ from its own. Indeed, philosophy requires these "other" forms of the absolute precisely on account of *their symbolic element*. As Hegel notes, philosophy begins exactly when art and religion present it with a discrepancy or break (*ein Bruch*) between "interior striving" (*innere Streben*) and "external reality" (*äusseren Wirklichkeit*) (*VGP I*, p. 71). The more immediate forms of consciousness and the forms of the absolute that remain tied to such immediacy work "as a stimulus" (*als einen Reiz*) for philosophical thought (*ENZ I*, §12). They offer thought the challenge of discovering the necessity in what at

first appears to be accidental. Technically speaking, however, philosophy does not “presuppose” these forms: it “posits” them. In other words, it remains dependent upon them as forms that must precede it *historically*, but it does not derive from them *logically*. Art and religion present philosophy with the material it needs for its own act of transformation. However, by Hegel’s logic, thought’s need for material, for something other than it, does not constitute an actual limitation to it. Indeed, as we have already seen, Hegel understands thought’s act of transformation to be so thorough that it becomes able to recognize the truth of the immediacy presented to it as part of its own act. In other words, in the course of acknowledging its need for something “other” than its own pure form, it concretizes itself and recognizes that what it really needed was just something that *seemed* to be other than it, for it too turns out to have a kind of immediate existence. Philosophical thought stands in need of the forms of art and religion because it needs an element of immediacy upon which it can act and through which it can discover not only the essential mediacy of what at first appeared to be merely immediate, but also *its own mediating capacity*. In thinking through the forms of art and religion, philosophy appropriates their content, but it remains in need of the *formal* difference that they provide. Logically speaking, philosophy may reach its completion and express “the whole” as a “mediated immediacy,” but it nonetheless remains in need of *the forms of* art and religion. Without these “other” forms, philosophical thought loses its life and degenerates into formalism (*ENZ I*, §12), and, as Hegel notes, formal thought in itself is *unreal* thought (*PG*, p. 56). Even with the transparent knowledge of the identity of itself with its other, spirit remains in need of the formal difference between the two; it must continue to express itself in media other than that of pure thought. According to Hegel, the form is “indispensable” to the essence (*PG*, p. 24). Art, religion, and philosophy may share the same content, but their difference in form is essential to spirit.

As we saw in chapter three, Hegel’s pronouncement that art’s ability to express the clarified truth is superseded by religion and philosophy has led commentators to dispute

the meaning of his claim that art is absolute. Yet Hegel leaves little doubt about his consideration of art as an "absolute" form of spirit. He declares quite directly, for example, "The empire of fine art is the empire of absolute spirit" (*Ä I*, p. 130). Even though Hegel values the greater clarity of religion and philosophy, he acknowledges the absolute necessity of art's particular—albeit ambiguous—form. As we have seen, the form of art does not even *aim* for the rational clarity of its concept. Its task is rather to effect the unity of the general essence and the individual appearance of spirit (*Ä I*, p. 140). It lets the divine idea of spirit *appear*, and in so doing it gives it an external existence and reality that it would not otherwise have (*Ä I*, pp. 127–28). Without this external confirmation, the idea of spirit lacks the certainty of itself which is necessary to its truth as spirit. As Hegel claims, "Art has been produced through the absolute spiritual need that the divine, the spiritual idea, be as *object* for consciousness and at first for the immediate intuition" (*VPR I-s*, p. 135). Only by manifesting itself in sensuous form can the idea of spirit gain the reality and certainty of its existence (*Ä II*, p. 130).

But the need for art is also apparent from the human side of spirit as well. Not only does the reconciliation of art let the infinite idea of spirit attain real spiritual existence, but it also allows finite human beings to feel and intuit themselves beyond mere finitude and to enter into the realm of the infinite. As Hegel explains, through art human beings *reproduce themselves*, and all human beings have the fundamental need to do this. As thinking beings, they must not only conceive of themselves in an other form, but also see, feel, and intuit themselves in this otherness (*Ä II*, p. 154). Thus, while Hegel contends that "the manifestation of the truth in sensuous form is not truly appropriate to spirit (*dem Geiste nicht wahrhaft angemessen sei*)" (*Ä I*, p. 144), he also suggests that *spirit needs the experience of this very inappropriateness*. The experience of the difference between itself and its other is part and parcel of spirit's experience of recognizing the identity of itself in its other. In order to know itself truly in the form of what is 'other' than it, spirit must *experience the discrepancy of*

its intrinsic difference. In order to be the reconciling unity that it is, spirit must undergo the difference between form and content that is involved in art. In short, spirit must bear the suffering and striving of the symbolic. Only in this way can it transform the immediacy of its abstract thought into concrete existence and reality.

Furthermore, as we have seen, Hegel considers religion's form of representation to be closer to pure thought than art's form of sensuous presentation (*Ä I*, p. 144). While art unites spirit with an external sensuous "other," religion unites the subjectivity of spirit with *an other subjectivity*. Spirit takes subjectivity as its explicit object and becomes able to identify itself in an "other" even more closely than it could in art. Religious consciousness comprehends its object *as a subject* and its truth *as self determining*. Religion therefore has the same content as philosophy, but it expresses the reality of spirit in a form specifically "other" than philosophy. More precisely, as Hegel explains, in religion the absolute becomes the object "not just in the form of thought but also in the form of its manifestation" (*VPR I-s*, pp. 33–34). As chapter four detailed, religion differs from thought precisely in its inclusion of a finite, symbolic dimension. While thought recognizes its object as itself, religion still conceives of its object as something outside of its own subjective activity. As Hegel insists, "The position of religion is this: the truth, which arrives to us through what is externally given" (*VGP I*, p. 92). In contrast to philosophy, which presents spirit's complete "return to itself," religion expresses spirit as still on the way to this completion. When the infinite enters religious consciousness it takes on finite form (i.e., the form of being other-than-self) (*VGP I*, pp. 89–93). Not yet recognized as thoroughly belonging to religious subjectivity itself, the object is still "undeveloped and indeterminate"; the content expressed in religion is "wrapped up" (*eingehüllt*) and in need of explication; it is still "a dull muffled weaving" of spirit (*VGP I*, pp. 88–89). Hegel therefore judges the form of religion to be ultimately inadequate to the self-determining truth it seeks to represent. It does not clarify its content completely but remains symbolic. "In all religions there is an oscillation (*Schwanken*) between the

imaged and thought" (*VGP I*, p. 107). Due to this "mixing" (*Vermischung*), religious consciousness cannot rise above representation completely (*VGP I*, p. 91).

However, as we have seen, Hegel affirms the absolute necessity of religion's particular form despite this limitation. In the first place, according to Hegel, because philosophy's form is necessarily esoteric, religion actually produces the highest form of spirit accessible to all humans (*NHS*, p. 66). Operating in the form of representation that corresponds to everyday human understanding, religion's form occurs within the realm of what is naturally familiar to human life experience. But, for Hegel, religion is not only necessary for those incapable of philosophical reflection. Quite to the contrary, he maintains that philosophy itself involves religion (*VGP I*, p. 85). Although philosophy surpasses religion in its clarity as well as in its capacity to resolve contradictions and grasp the "whole," it is not *in itself* sufficient to the full expression of this content. As Hegel explains, in order for the truth to become fully realized, it must penetrate the depths of subjectivity and become "our own," and to do this, it must pervade all of human reality including the realm of emotions and feelings: "We are human and have reason; what is human, reasonable, in us echoes (*widerklingt*) in us, in our feeling, disposition, heart—in our subjectivity in general. It is through this echo (*Widerklang*), this determined movement, that a content is at all ours and as ours (*überhaupt unser und als der unsrige ist*)" (*VGP I*, p. 88). Indeed for Hegel, religion's task in the realization of spirit is specifically to touch the human heart, to enter into human subjectivity. As he understands it, religion "must be expressly directed toward the heart and emotional disposition (*Gemüt*); it must enter the sphere of subjectivity and thus the domain of finite representational means" (*VGPI*, p. 90). Even in the case of absolute religion, which Hegel believes to correspond most fully with philosophy's ultimate presentation of the truth, spirit presents itself in the finite form of representation; "the vessel (*das Gefäß*) through which it communicates itself is the heart, the representing consciousness and the understanding" (*VGPI*, p. 90).

The symbolic duplicity intrinsic to religion lets religion accomplish a mediation of spirit that pure thought cannot. Religion does not express the reconciliation of the particular and the general in the universality of pure thought, but it offers spirit a concreteness that abstract thought does not have and that is necessary to thought's own process of becoming concrete. Although religion falls short of grasping the generality of God, it manifests the aspect of God's appearing—other more vividly than formal thought does: “Now religion is of the speculative, so to speak, as the *situation of consciousness* whose sides are not *simple thought determinations*, but *concretely fulfilled*” (VPR I-s, p. 31). In religion the idea of God presents itself to itself or *represents* itself. And, as we have seen, it is only through this act of letting itself be something other (than the formal idea of self-determining activity) that it gains full-fledged existence (*Dasein*) (VPR I-m, pp. 229, 105). Thus, for Hegel, there is no need to make a choice between religion and philosophy, as Lu De Vos seems to suggest.<sup>5</sup> Nor does Hegel's claim that philosophy presents the truth in a more complete way than religion mean that religion serves as a mere “preparation” for philosophy.

Both art and religion perform a service absolutely necessary to spirit's process of development: both allow spirit to *discover itself in an other form* and become the reality its concept supposes it to be. Art allows spirit to experience itself in the form of a sensuous other, and religion allows spirit to experience itself in the form of an other subjectivity. In practical terms, this means that art and religion teach individual subjects to put themselves in the place of an other. They teach individual subjects about their intrinsic connection to others, and they illustrate the possibility of transformation.

### III. Hegel's Idea of Spirit

#### A. *Genuine Self-determination*

Having articulated the senses in which philosophy is both superior to art and religion and dependent upon these forms, we are now in a position to consider how it is that

spirit's process of self-determination is at once whole and dependent upon symbolic forms which testify to its moments of self-alienation and ambiguity. As we have already seen, for Hegel, *spirit* is that which develops and determines itself. Implicit to the meaning of self-determination, however, is the experience of *not having been* what one determines oneself to be. Genuine self-determination requires that one was *not* "always already" self-determining. For Hegel, there is no such thing as simply *being* self-determining. Spirit must *become* self-determining. It must begin as something other than the self-determining spirit into which it gradually makes itself. What this means is that spirit must start out as something simply or immediately there and then undergo a process of transformation. Spirit's process of self-determination must begin at the beginning, at a place of nondetermination, at immediacy *per se* (WL I, pp. 65–79; ENZ I, §1). Then, through the course of its development spirit comes to recognize that its mere immediacy is something it had to posit in the first stage of its activity, something that it had to be *in order to become* the self-determining activity its concept supposes it to be.

Crucial to this development is spirit's power to "endure" the force of the negative (PG, p. 46). In order to move beyond mere immediacy, spirit must "negate" it. This negation is neither a denial nor a deletion of the sensuous other, but rather a *positive* transformation of it. Spirit's "negation" of the sensuous immediate consists in a kind of withdrawal from it; spirit mediates the immediate by gaining a kind of distance from it. Through this negative experience of alienation, spirit discovers that it is not just this immediacy but also something that can distinguish itself from this immediacy by reflecting upon it. Thus spirit lets *itself* be transformed at the same time that it gives immediacy meaning. By reflecting upon its immediacy, spirit makes itself something more than that immediacy: it transforms that immediacy into something mediated; it recognizes it as an aspect of itself. In this way spirit discovers itself to be something 'other' than the simplicity it first appeared to be. This realization leads to another: spirit comes to see that the negativity of its act is not extrinsic to it, but essential to its being



as spirit. The experience of negation and of the immediacy involved in it *belongs to* spirit in such a way that spirit could not be itself without them. Spirit's power and existence, Hegel insists, is only as great as the negativity it undergoes: "The power of spirit is only as great as its expression, its depth only as deep as it dares to spread itself out and lose itself in its exposition" (PG, p. 18). Spirit's gain is only as great as its courage to undergo loss. As Hegel explains, the negative has a "magical," transformative power for the spirit that endures it:

Not the life that shrinks before death and keeps itself pure from devastation (*Verwüstung*), but that which bears it and maintains itself in it is the life of spirit. Spirit wins its truth only by finding itself in absolute disruption (*Zer-rissenheit*). It is this power not as the positive which pulls away . . . , rather it is this power by looking the negative in the face and abiding with it. This abiding is the magical power that transforms it into being. (PG, p. 36)

The fact that this process of negation is essential to spirit's being and activity concurs with Hegel's insistence that spirit may never be reduced to a simple immediacy, a mere beginning, or an abstract end (PG, p. 31, *ENZ I*, §1). Spirit is neither the immediacy of its beginning nor the immediacy of its end. It is *the whole process* of the beginning, middle, and end—the positing, mediation, and fulfillment. "As little as a building is finished when its ground is laid, is the attained concept of the whole (*der erreichte Begriff des Ganzen*) the whole itself" (PG, p. 19). The being of absolute spirit cannot be abstracted from the whole process of its negative and positive moments. Nor can thought's employment of the sign be considered in isolation from the various symbolic activities that allow spirit to know itself in its difference. Spirit is not *just* the objective substance it produces: it is also the subjective *activity* of that producing. As Hegel emphasizes, spirit's "*life is act*" (VGP I, p. 21). Spirit is precisely this: "to bring itself into existence, i.e., into consciousness . . . to be self-producing, self-objectifying, self-

knowing" (*LHP*, p. 74). "The infinite nature of spirit is its inner process of not resting, of essentially producing, and of existing by means of its production" (*LHP*, p. 70).

### *B. The Process is the Result*

Accordingly, for Hegel, spirit's process of self-determination and its resulting truth as self-determining activity are not opposed in the way that the understanding opposes process and result. While the understanding assumes that the result is something "other" than its preceding process, philosophical reason comprehends that a result can be neither opposed to nor separated from the process that gives rise to it. Given the understanding's inability to recognize the necessary unity of process and result, it tends to disregard the process and focus simply on the result. Hegel notes that this tendency is especially prevalent when the understanding tries to assess the work of philosophy: "because philosophy is essentially in the element of generality that encloses the particular within it, the appearance occurs with it more than with other sciences as if the purposes or last results were the actual matter at hand and the actual execution were only the inessential" (*PG*, p. 11). Hegel emphasizes, however, that the result "essentially" includes "that out of which it resulted. . . . for otherwise it would be an immediacy and not a result" (*WL I*, p. 49). Spirit is not something that can simply be postulated or encapsulated in a principle but something that must literally *be worked out* (*PG*, pp. 35, 41).

For the issue (*Sache*) is not exhausted in its purpose, but in its *execution* (***Ausführung***), nor is the *result* the *real* whole, but it together with its becoming (*Werden*). The purpose taken for itself is the lifeless (*unlebendige*) general, as the tendency is the mere drive that nevertheless dispenses with its reality, and the bare result is the corpse (*Leichnam*) that leaves the tendency behind. (*PG*, p. 13; cf. *WL II*, pp. 484–87)

Spirit's purpose or end-result loses its meaning if it becomes abstracted from the activity which produces it. This

unity of process and result is essential to the reality of spirit. Although this complex identification of opposites eludes the understanding, philosophical reason comprehends it. Through philosophy spirit recognizes that it is *both* the process *and* the result of its own development (VPR I, p. 133). It comprehends that it is not the result of some “other” activity, but of *its own* determining process (Ä II, p. 133).

Philosophy enables spirit to recognize the identity of itself throughout its manifold experiences and thus constitutes the completion of spirit’s self-determination. Through philosophy spirit becomes able to realize the positivity of the negative and thus the full extent of its creative power. It becomes able to recognize itself as both the subject and the object of itself, that is, as *the totality* of its manifested moments. Philosophy allows spirit to see the ultimate identity of its various, disparate moments of experience. Through philosophy, spirit comprehends that it has to undergo periods of self-alienation in order to become the self-grounding activity it is; it realizes that it has to experience the “otherness” of sensuous immediacy and the ambiguity of the symbolic in order to be able to recognize these finite dimensions of reality as part of itself.

Thus, through philosophy, spirit learns to comprehend itself—the whole—as a “*unity of differences*” (VPR I-m, p. 30). Far from being an immediate identification, spirit brings about its self-identity only in and through its experience of intrinsic difference or lack of identity. Spirit is not a simple unity, not a “night . . . in which all cows are black” (PG, p. 22), but a unity *that includes real difference*. It is an identity produced *out of* difference (PG, p. 23). For Hegel this identity in difference or immediacy in mediation is precisely what characterizes spirit:

It is a self-differentiation, a bringing of self into existence, into being for another’s apprehension, and in this process remaining self-identical. It is the eternal creation of the world . . . an absolute movement which at the same time is absolute rest—eternal self-communion. This is the

Idea's being with itself, the capacity to revert into itself, to coincide with its other and yet to be at home with itself in the other. (*LHP*, p. 79)

Essential to this act of identification is, of course, the sign. Through spirit's mastery of the sign, it learns how to perform the act of abstraction which makes its self-identification possible. The sign allows the intelligence to focus on the meaning it chooses, creates, and intends for itself, while designating other meanings as merely accidental. In this way, it serves a function indispensable to spirit's act of self-determination in philosophical thought. Nonetheless—and this is the point that is too easily overlooked—the sign is not *sufficient* to spirit's activity of full self-determination. In order to realize itself *completely*, spirit must also resort to the kind of identifications enacted by the symbol—that is, to qualitative identifications which are ambiguously related to other, qualitative differences. These symbolic identifications allow spirit to give meaning to its existence even while it cannot comprehend and determine it completely. They facilitate spirit's transition from self-alienation to self-differentiated identity by enabling spirit to conceive of itself even while it remains partially alienated from itself. Symbols allow spirit to experience itself not thinking.

Through the symbolic, spirit comes to know itself in a form other than the transparent form of thought—a form which is ambiguous and displacing, but which nonetheless allows for a specific kind of recognition. For this reason, the symbol is just as essential to spirit's return to itself as the sign is. The symbol enables spirit to experience itself in an other form, to learn that otherness and difference are intrinsic to its activity, and to endure the darkness of its own negativity. And, for Hegel, absolute spirit is precisely the power of self-identification that bears negativity and difference within it. In order to be truly self-determining, spirit must suffer the real loss of its mere positivity, and in order to be *whole*, it must include and contain the negative experiences of ambiguity and alienation.



## Conclusion

This interpretation of Hegel's philosophy began as a response to Derrida's questioning of Hegel's assertion that "spirit" can determine itself without recourse to a real "other." We have taken Derrida's criticisms of Hegel's notion of spirit as an occasion to reexamine Hegel's notion of spirit and to consider what "wholeness" and "self-determination" would have to mean in order for them to be attributable to a spirit that undergoes true self-alienation and real self-loss. In response to this issue, we have suggested that the role of the symbol and the symbolic in Hegel's philosophy provides something of a key to Hegel's seemingly outrageous claims. We have, in other words, been able to argue that spirit does determine itself completely even while it also undergoes periods of self-alienation and loss: spirit's symbolic mediation enables it to know itself in the midst of these dark moments. Not only does spirit's "wholeness" require that it contain and include the ambiguous, alienating moments of the symbolic, but its "self-determination" requires that it contain and include the loss of more limited self-conceptions and experiences.

Derrida's focus on the sign's mediation of spirit leads him to understand the Hegelian spirit as deleting or discarding the sensuous other in favor of its own purposes. However, our focus on the symbolic mediation of spirit has led us to see that spirit does not leave its sensuous dimension behind as a mere preliminary stage to its fulfillment; spirit actually incorporates the sensuous into its absolute dimension through its various acts of symbolization. In both

art and religion, the finite dimension of the symbolic proves essential to spirit's being as absolute, and this symbolic element remains in tension with the clarity of philosophical thought facilitated by the sign.

Chapter one introduced this theme through a presentation of Hegel's concept of the symbol. With reference to his *Philosophie des Geistes* and *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, we presented Hegel's basic definition of the symbol as it stands in contrast to the sign and as it includes artistic forms such as metaphor and allegory. There, as we took up Derrida's criticisms of Hegel's "theory" of metaphor, we noted important differences between the terminology of Derrida's and Hegel's, the specific context of Hegel's discussion of metaphor, and the limited sense in which Derrida's critique is valid. Our analysis led, however, to the conclusion that Hegel's notion of the symbol actually includes much more ambiguity than Derrida seems to acknowledge. Then in chapter two we traced spirit's process of moving toward self-identification through its experiences in intuition, representation, imagination, and memory. Here, while the role of the sign did in fact prove to constitute the final transition to thought, the previous symbolic identifications of the imagination also proved to be essential to the whole process of spirit's identification of its subjective conception of itself and its objective existence. Not only do these symbolic identifications serve as the basis from which the sign-making imagination must abstract, but they also serve as the positive means by which the intelligence becomes capable of conceiving such an identity in the first place. Without its previous symbolic associations, the intelligence could never have even *imagined* the possibility of identifying itself with the objectivity of its experience. In this way we saw that, while Hegel constructs the sign as a means to theoretical abstraction, he neither discounts the sensuous nor denies the intelligence's dependence upon it. This chapter also demonstrated that Hegel understands language to include symbolic elements even as it uses the sign as its basic building block. In addition we saw that it is actually not the sign, but *the breakdown* of the sign's relation that serves to

constitute the intelligence's transition to thought. The intelligence recognizes that the sign can produce only the formal theoretical identity of thought and being. Spirit must develop its practical and objective dimensions and then return to the domain of the symbolic as it exists in the forms of art and religion.

In chapter three, through an extensive analysis of spirit's presentation in art, we discovered several ways in which this absolutely necessary form of spirit is symbolic. Not only did the art form that Hegel explicitly calls symbolic prove necessary to the development of the latter, more ideal forms, but these more developed forms proved to have significant symbolic components as well. Most importantly, Hegel's general idea of art was shown to be thoroughly symbolic. To be sure, this symbolic element defines the limit of art's form and its subsequent need to be complemented by philosophy. However, at the same time, it constitutes the particularity of art's absoluteness in such a way as to make the idea of art's "end" an untenable interpretation of Hegelian aesthetics. Indeed, Hegel's assertion of art's absolute status underlines the importance of spirit's being in immediate, sensuous, and symbolic form. Here the ambiguity and alienation of the symbolic penetrates spirit's absolute dimension.

Next, chapter four detailed how Hegel conceives of religion as including an essential element of symbolic representation. Although religion is, in a certain way, that to which art's symbolism was pointing, it is itself symbolic with respect to the fully clarified truth of philosophy. Here, we followed Hegel's discussion of various religions and saw how he believes there to be a line of development from the primitive relatively unconscious use of symbolic representation to an explicit understanding of both its necessity and its limitation. More importantly, in the process, we saw that Hegel conceives of religion as fundamentally symbolic. Even its absolute form, which tends toward thought, proves to be inextricably bound up with the symbolic. Here, too, absolute spirit turns out to include the "other," nontransparent elements of the symbolic.



Finally, chapter five demonstrated how Hegel conceives of philosophy as surpassing the forms of art and religion with respect to its capacity for clarity and truth. Because philosophy generates its own ground, its form corresponds most closely to spirit's own self-determining capacity. Although art and religion have the perfect unity of the oppositions of the understanding (finite-infinite, sensuous-spiritual, subject-object, human-divine) as their content, their forms are not able to make this perfect unity explicit in the way that philosophy can. Nonetheless, philosophy's own limits call for the necessity of these other symbolic forms. Philosophy contains the content of art and religion, but it cannot convey these truths in the specific way that they do. It can comprehend *how* art and religion work, but it cannot *work* the way they do. It can understand their effects, but it cannot *produce* these effects. Thus, as we have been arguing throughout this entire book, spirit cannot be reduced to philosophical thought: its absoluteness includes the symbolic forms of art and religion. To be sure, thought resolves the tension of the symbolic and in this sense the symbol serves as the negative of thought—that which thought dissolves in order to give rise to itself. But the symbol's function is not only negative.

Spirit has the need to be in *an other form*, and this is part of its *positive constitution and self-determination*. Due to their symbolic elements, art and religion present their content as something *other* than the spirit that intuitively represents them. This appearance of difference which art and religion offer—the formal difference which they embody—is wholly necessary to spirit's life. With the help of philosophy, spirit comes to see its identity with this otherness, but it does not cancel out or delete this kind of otherness. It just comes to see this difference *as part of itself*. As Hegel insists, "Spirit's life is *act*" (VGPI, p. 21; PG, p. 27). It exists only in so far as it develops itself, that is, only in so far as it transforms itself from one thing into an *other*. Through philosophy, spirit experiences and completes its reconciling activity, but it needs art and religion in order *to know* its own internal difference.

At first sight, the fact that spirit's process and reality depends upon the symbolic mediations of the imagination, art, and religion seems to preclude the possibility of it ever being absolute or wholly self-determining. However, as we have already seen, spirit never reaches the point of 'simply being' absolute. Its absoluteness lies *within* its self-creating, self-determining act. Spirit *becomes* absolute. It is never absolute "once and for all." It cannot sustain its absoluteness on the level of immediacy, but must continually create and recreate, present and represent itself. In other words, *in order to preserve its self-identity*, spirit must remain in self-differentiating motion. The realized concept of spirit is precisely this paradox.

The "wholeness" and "self-determination" of absolute spirit must be understood accordingly. First, Hegel's claim that absolute spirit comprises the whole truth is not, as many commentators have suggested, a claim about some all-powerful thing that goes around appropriating the life out of everything. Rather, it is a claim about the ultimate coherence of reality. Against the ordinary understanding, which tends to conceive of the absolute as something purely positive, Hegel insists that to be really absolute—truly whole—spirit must be permeated by negativity as well as positivity. For Hegel, wholeness means nothing but the resolution of such oppositions. Spirit's realization, then, is the realization that there can be no such thing as an absolute pureness or pure absoluteness. Absoluteness can only mean the full embracing of the fundamental ambivalence of reality—of itself. This means, on the one hand, that the negative "is just as much positive" or that everything is ultimately redeemable. However, as Hegel repeatedly warns, this idea of perfect reconciliation can too easily fall to the level of "mere edification." "Philosophy must beware of being edifying" because the whole truth is a *complex, double-edged* truth. Just as there is no such thing as an absolute negative or an absolute interruption to the redeeming power of spirit, there is also no such thing as an absolutely positive recuperation. Not only is the negative just as much positive, but the positive is also thoroughly

negative. Absoluteness *includes* both. (Otherwise, it would be lacking and not absolute.) Therefore, spirit's transformation of the negative necessarily entails a kind of loss, namely, the loss of immediacy, of simplicity, the loss of the possibility of fixating on the finite (or falling into a 'bad' infinity)—the loss of *absolute negativity as well as absolute positivity*. Spirit's loss is *part of* its wholeness; its loss is part of what makes it the self-determining activity it is. In order to develop, spirit must repeatedly give up the comfort of limited perspectives. It cannot rest with that which is immediately present, nor can it afford the luxury of fixating on any single configuration for too long. It must continue to move on, refusing the temptation to mistake any single part of its experience for the whole of itself. In order to keep itself in existence, it must continue to grow, to manifest and create itself, to become other.

This understanding of wholeness as the resolution of contradictions allows Hegel to conceive of absolute spirit as infinite. But, as is always the case with Hegel, the attribution of "infinity" to spirit necessarily entails and includes the opposite attribution, that of "finitude." For Hegel, spirit could not be truly infinite or whole without including genuine finitude. As much as the finite needs the infinite to complete its very being as finite, the infinite also needs the finite to give it finality and closure. The finite is what transforms the "bad," endless infinite into a self-reflecting whole. The infinite must appear as finite in order to be infinite because it limits itself (and denies its own infinity) if it opposes itself to the finite and holds itself to be "other" than it (*VPR I-s*, pp.31, 191; *Ä I*, p. 139; *WL I*, pp. 125–66). This means, in essence, that spirit must *include its other in order to be itself*. In order to be what it is "supposed" to be, in order to be truly and wholly *self-determining*, spirit must include an element of *not* being self-determining. True self-determination involves this kind of self-loss.

Thus, although the symbol's intrinsic otherness and lack of self-coincidence seems to preclude the possibility of spirit's complete self-determination, *it actually serves to realize it*. The symbolic is essential to spirit's act of self-

determination because it provides spirit with an element of “being-other.” It allows spirit to know itself in its otherness, to experience its self-alienation—to think itself not thinking. By “interrupting” the self-identical flow of thought, the symbolic gives spirit the occasion to encounter itself in its intrinsic difference. But since the inclusion of this intrinsic difference within its self-identification is just what spirit is supposed to be, the symbolic element also comprises a positive element of spirit’s self-determination. It allows spirit to know itself as it truly is.



## Notes

### Introduction

1. The difficulties involved with the translating of “*Geist*” into English are well-known: no English word accomplishes the sense of both “mind” and “spirit” evoked by the German. Therefore, unless the reader is to be burdened with the awkward “mind/spirit” construction, a choice must be made. Here the term “spirit” has been chosen for reasons that should become obvious.

2. Jacques Derrida, “The Pit and the Pyramid,” in *Margins of Philosophy*, tran. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 107. Hereafter “P&P.” Originally published as “le puits et la pyramide,” *Marges de la philosophie* (Paris: Les éditions de minuit, 1972), p. 125.

3. See “A Note on the Textual Sources” for an explanation of textual editions used.

4. Jacques Derrida, “White Mythology,” in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982). Hereafter “WM.”

5. Derrida cites Aristotle’s definition of metaphor in the *Poetics* 1457b6–9 as follows: “Metaphor (*metaphora*) consists in giving (*epiphora*) the thing a name (*onomatos*) that belongs to something else (*allogriou*), the transference being either from genus to species (*apo tou genous epi eidos*), or from species to genus (*apo tou eidous epi to genos*), or on the grounds of analogy (*kata to analogon*).”

6. Anatole France, *The Garden of Epicurus*, trans. Alfred Allinson (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1923). Cited in “White Mythology,” p. 212. Significantly, Derrida understands the concepts

here referred to (i.e., absolute, infinite, intangible, etc.) as signs, not symbols or metaphors, later noting that the difference between signs and symbols is a matter of degree, that is, of the extent of the *usure* (WM, p. 212).

7. See "A Note on the Textual Sources" for an explanation of textual editions used.

8. Here I follow the English translation of "White Mythology" in citing the Knox translation: *Hegel's Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975, reprinted in 1991), pp. 404–405. Compare this passage to the German Suhrkamp edition, *Ä I*, p. 518.

9. Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1978). Hereafter "SSP."

10. Derrida is correct to observe that Hegel is not consistent in his various cultural-historical analyses. For example, he praises polysemia in the German language, while denigrating it in the Egyptian writing (P&P, pp. 98–99). The case is similar when Hegel claims, following von Humboldt, that languages with less complex grammars are more sophisticated than languages with complex grammar, but then says that the simplicity of Chinese grammar is due to a lack of cultural development (P&P, p. 103).

11. Jacques Derrida, "From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism without Reserve," in *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 259. Hereafter "RGE."

12. Jacques Derrida, *Glas*, trans. John P. Leavey, Jr. and Richard Rand (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), p. 133.

13. Derrida writes: "in question will be, but according to a movement unheard of by philosophy, an other which is no longer *its other*." Jacques Derrida, "Tympan," in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. xiv.

14. Stephen Bungay, *Beauty and Truth: A Study of Hegel's Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

15. William Desmond, *Art and the Absolute: A Study of Hegel's Aesthetics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986) and "Art, Philosophy, and Concreteness in Hegel," *The Owl of Minerva* 16, 2 (Spring 1985).

16. Annemarie Gethmann-Siefert, "Zur Begründung einer Ästhetik nach Hegel," in *Hegel-Studien*, Band 13 (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1978) and "Eine Diskussion ohne Ende: zu Hegels These vom Ende der Kunst," in *Hegel-Studien*, Band 16 (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1981).

17. Hermann Glockner, "Die Ästhetik in Hegels System," *Beiträge zum Verständnis und zur Kritik Hegels*, *Hegel-Studien*, Beiheft 2 (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1965).

18. Jack Kaminsky, *Hegel on Art* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1962).

19. Helmut Kuhn, "Die Gegenwärtigkeit der Kunst nach Hegels Vorlesungen über Ästhetik," (Stuttgarter Hegel-Tage 1970), in *Hegel-Studien*, Beiheft 11, hrsg. von Hans G. Gadamer (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1974) and "Die Vollendung der klassischen deutschen Ästhetik durch Hegel," *Schriften zur Ästhetik*, hrsg. von Wolfhart Henckmann (Munich, 1966). (Originally in Kuhn, *Kulturfunktion der Kunst* [Berlin, 1931].)

20. Peter Szondi, *Poetik und Geschichtsphilosophie I: Antike und Moderne in der Ästhetik der Goethezeit: Hegels Lehre von der Dichtung*, hrsg. von Senta Metz und Hans Hagen Hildebrandt (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974).

21. Robert Wicks, *Hegel's Theory of Aesthetic Judgement* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994).

22. Jeong-Im Kwon, "Die Metamorphosen der 'Symbolischen Kunstform': Zur Rehabilitierung der ästhetischen Argumente Hegels," in *Phänomen versus System, Hegel Studien*, Beiheft 34, hrsg. von A. Gethmann-Siefert (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1992).

23. Paul de Man, "Sign and Symbol in Hegel's Aesthetics," *Critical Inquiry* 8 (Summer 1982).

24. H. Rehder, "Of structure and symbol: The significance of Hegel's phenomenology for literary criticism," in *A Hegel symposium*, VIII, ed. D. C. Travis (Austin, Tex.: Dept. of Germanic Languages, University of Texas, 1962).



25. Robert C. Tucker, "The symbolism of history in Hegel and Marx," *Journal of Philosophy* 54 (1957).

26. Joseph Muenzhuber, "Sinnbild and Symbol," *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 5 (1950).

27. Willem DeVries, *Hegel's Theory of Mental Activity* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988). In "Hegel on Representation and Thought" (*G. W. F. Hegel: Critical Assessments*, 4 vols., ed. Robert Stern, [London: Routledge, 1993]), DeVries mentions Hegel in connection with the symbolic representation, but he defines this term differently than Hegel does. "Symbolic representationalism" for DeVries means that: "Possessing a concept of A = Having the ability to image A or being able to use mental word A." He says Hegel combines this with classical non-representationalism: "Possessing a concept A = Standing in some relation R' to A itself" (p. 128).

28. Malcolm Clark, *Logic and System: A Study of the Transition from 'Vorstellung' to Thought in the Philosophy of Hegel* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971). Clark also argues for the necessity of *Vorstellung* to thought. *Vorstellung*, he says, "is not simply 'below' thought as a level which can be passed and forgotten. . . . *Vorstellung* is the 'other' of thought and yet is 'interior' to it" *ibid.*, p. 40.

29. Daniel J. Cook, *Language in the Philosophy of Hegel* (The Hague: Mouton, 1973).

30. Josef Simon, *Das Problem der Sprache bei Hegel* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1966) and "Die Kategorien im 'Gewöhnlichen' und im 'Spekulativen Satz,'" *Wiener Jahrbuch für Philosophie* 3, 31, 34, (1970).

31. Theodor Bodammer, *Hegels Deutung der Sprache* (Hamburg: F. Meiner, 1969).

32. John McCumber, *A Company of Words: Hegel, Language, and Systematic Philosophy* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993), pp. 124, 172–74. In his effort to unify Anglo-American and continental traditions, John McCumber argues quite convincingly that Hegel is the first major philosopher to have made "the linguistic turn." Hegel's system, he says, is about itself, about its own language, even going so far as to suggest that Hegel could have and should have called spirit "language." *Ibid.*, p. 20.

33. Jürgen Habermas, "Labor and Interaction: Remarks on Hegel's Jena *Philosophy of Mind*," in *Theory and Practice*, trans. John Viertel (Boston: Beacon Press, 1974).

34. Donald Phillip Verene, *Hegel's Recollection: A Study of Images in the 'Phenomenology of Spirit'* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985).

35. Jürgen Habermas, "Labor and Interaction: Remarks on Hegel's Jena *Philosophy of Mind*," in *Theory and Practice*, trans. John Viertel (Boston: Beacon Press, 1974.)

36. Josef Simon, *Das Problem der Sprache bei Hegel* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1966).

37. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Hegels Dialektik* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1971).

38. Joseph C Flay, *Hegel's Quest for Certainty* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), p. 252.

39. Quentin Lauer, *Hegel's Concept of God* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982).

40. Eugen Fink, *Sein und Mensch: Vom Wesen der ontologischen Erfahrung* (München: Verlag Kant Alber Freiburg, 1977), pp. 48, 197.

41. Ute Guzzoni, *Werden zu sich: Eine Untersuchung zu Hegels "Wissenschaft der Logik"* (Freiburg: Karl Alber, 1963, 1982).

42. Ludwig Siep, *Anerkennung als Prinzip der praktischen Philosophie* (Freiburg: Alber Verlag, 1978).

43. Robert R. Williams, *Recognition: Fichte and Hegel on the Other* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992) and "Hegel's Concept of Geist," in *Hegel's Philosophy of Spirit*, ed. Peter G. Stillman (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987).

## Chapter One

1. In his anthropology Hegel also discusses the symbol and the sign in relation to spirit's corporal expression. Here too, however, the role of the symbolic is significant. See *ENZ III*, §§389–411.

2. See "A Note of the Textual Sources" for an explanation of the textual editions used.

3. Jeong-Im Kwon asserts that Hegel's concept of the symbol underwent significant development during the years in which he lectured on aesthetics in Berlin, but she actually specifies only developments in his conception of the symbolic art form and the way in which the symbol is associated with Hegel's concept of beauty. Indeed, she herself admits that Hegel's definition of the symbol goes back at least until his *Philosophische Propädeutik*. See Jeong-Im Kwon, "Die Metamorphosen der 'symbolischen Kunstform,'" *Hegel-Studien*, Beiheft 34 (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1992), p. 43. Helmut Schneider also claims that there was a development in Hegel's "concept of the symbol" between his Heidelberg and Berlin years, but, like Kwon, he merely refers to the fact that Hegel once associated the symbol with the human form of classical art and later identified it with preclassical forms of art. See the preface to G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesung über Ästhetik, Berlin 1820/21*, hrsg. von Helmut Schneider (Frankfurt: Peter Lang Verlag, 1995), p. 14.

4. Here Hegel places the symbolizing capacity within the province of the poetic, productive imagination, a move which concurs with the notes of some of his students who heard his later lectures on the encyclopedic *Philosophy of Spirit*, but which conflicts with Hegel's own outline of these later lectures, where he places the symbolizing poetic imagination on the level of the associating imagination and distinguishes it from the productive imagination.

5. Jeong-Im Kwon's "Die Metamorphosen der 'symbolischen Kunstform,'" p. 74, my translation. Kwon cites the 1826 lecture manuscript 137 by Griesheim as follows: "eine Existenz, die unmittelbar vorhanden oder gegeben ist, die aber nicht auf diese unmittelbare Weise nur genommen werden soll, sondern nach einer Bedeutung gebracht, genommen wird."

6. Ibid, p. 74, my translation. Kwon cites the 1826 lecture manuscripts 138 & 144 by Griesheim.

7. Ibid, p. 82, my translation. Kwon cites the 1828/29 lecture manuscript 86 by Libelt.

8. Ibid, p. 82, my translation. Kwon cites the 1828/29 lecture manuscript 59a by Libelt.

9. At least with respect to the published versions of the *Philosophie des Geistes*, there seem to be no substantial discrepancies in Hegel's articulation of his definitions of the symbol and the sign. One may, however, note slight differences in emphasis. For example, the 1827/28 lecture notes suggest that Hegel emphasized the way in which the symbol identifies its meaning. There the symbol's externality is said to have "the same" "essential content as its meaning." At the same time, however, the text takes the difference between the symbol's intuition and its meaning for granted, suggesting for example that the eagle may serve as a symbol for strength. Hegel's emphasis on the symbol's identification with its meaning probably resulted from his desire to distinguish the symbol from the sign, which he maintains is connected to its meaning "in an arbitrary way" (*Phil G*, p. 209).

10. Ferdinand de Saussure argues that the cases in which such an identity between word and meaning occur are far too few to constitute "organic elements of a linguistic system." Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, 5th ed., trans. Roy Harris (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1992), p. 69.

11. Sigmund Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (1916–40), trans. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1989), pp. 187–90 and *An Outline of Psychoanalysis* (1940), trans. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1963), p. 53.

12. Ibid., pp. 186, 201–204.

13. Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, p. 68.

14. Ibid., p. 68.

15. Ibid., p. 68.

16. Ibid., p. 71.

17. Charles Peirce, *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, selected and edited by Justus Buchler (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1955).

18. Ibid., p. 112.

19. Julia Kristeva, "From Sign to Symbol," in *Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 72.

20. Hans G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1992), p. 154.

21. Hans G. Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, ed. Robert Bernasconi, trans. Nicholas Walker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 31.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

23. Hans G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp. 152–54.

24. The forms Hegel discusses here are primarily poetic, but not exclusively so. Hegel allows for example that the riddle may be presented in nonlinguistic forms (*Ä I*, p. 510).

25. Strictly speaking, according to a claim Hegel makes in his *Enzyklopädie*, “real” (*eigentlichen*) symbolism is conscious symbolism (*ENZ III*, §411). His categorization of Egyptian symbolism in his lectures on aesthetics as the first “real” (*eigentlich*) symbolism concurs with this claim. Despite this technicality, Hegel does *not* restrict his use of the term “symbolism” to conscious symbolism in either text. Indeed, in his lectures on aesthetics he seems to suggest the opposite when he says that conscious symbolism of the comparative type may not be considered symbolic in the true sense of the word—presumably because the poet who makes the comparisons is conscious of the meaning he or she wants to convey and aware of the limitations of the symbolic (See *VPK*, p. 142). The earliest lectures are perhaps the most clarifying with respect to this point: there Hegel says that while the first and last forms of symbolism (i.e., the unconscious and comparative) belong to this form in a loose sense, true symbolism occurs in the middle of these extremes (*VÄ 1820/21*, p. 112).

26. Though the individual forms serve different purposes throughout history, the comparative forms of conscious symbolism, taken together, transcend the symbolic form of art and are found throughout classical and romantic poetry as well. Although Hegel often discusses poetry as reaching its highest realization in the romantic art form (*Ä III*, pp. 122–23; *VPK 1823*, 39), he maintains that poetry is “the *general art*,” extending through all of art’s forms (*Ä III*, p. 233). This vision of poetry as the universal art form may be traced back to Hegel’s earliest lectures on aesthetics (*VÄ 1820/21*, p. 292; *VPK 1823*, p. 46; see also *VÄ 1820/21*, p. 122).

27. In the 1820/21 lectures, Hegel included the fairy tale and not the metamorphosis (VÄ 1820/21, p. 124)

28. As Peter Szondi points out, Hegel is not thoroughly consistent with regard to his categorization of these symbolic forms. For example, he maintains that the poet who creates a fable begins with a concrete situation and then adds a moral significance, yet he also allows that the poet may invent the concrete situation for the sake of representing its moral meaning. See Peter Szondi, *Poetik und Geschichtsphilosophie I: Antike und Moderne in der Ästhetik der Goethezeit: Hegels Lehre von der Dichtung*, herausgegeben von Senta Metz und Hans Hagen Hildebrandt (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974), p. 393 and *Ä I*, p. 498.

29. Hegel's definition of the image here as a symbolic form is not to be confused with his use of the term in the *Enzyklopädie*, where images arise quite naturally through the intelligence's regular theoretical activity of unifying the manifold of its experience. Here Hegel is concerned with the image as a product of artistic consciousness.

## Chapter Two

1. See "A Note on the Textual Sources" for an explanation of the textual editions used.

2. For Hegel, the fact that the intelligence determines the object and that the object also contains these determinations within itself is not contradictory. Spirit "produces the self-developing and changing determinations of the object out of itself. . . . The determinations known by [spirit] are however intrinsic to the object, but at the same time posited by [spirit]" (*ENZ III*, §441, Zus.).

3. Murray Greene, "Hegel's Triadic Doctrine of Cognitive Mind," in *G.W.F. Hegel: Critical Assessments*, ed. Robert Stern (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 100 (Originally published in *Idealistic Studies* 2 [1972], pp. 208–28).

4. As David Farrell Krell well notes, the function and effect of "interiorizing remembrance" or "*Erinnerung*" extends far beyond the place that Hegel explicitly attributes to it here in his psychology, playing critical roles in Hegel's logic, philosophy of

nature, and in other sections of his philosophy of spirit. Even in the psychology, as Krell notes, *Erinnerung* is operative “even before it has come to be,” that is, at the level of intuition. See Krell’s “Of Pits and Pyramids: Hegel on Memory, Remembrance, and Writing,” in *Of Memory, Reminiscence, and Writing: On the Verge* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), especially p. 213.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 214.

6. John Sallis, *Spacings—of Reason and Imagination in texts of Kant, Fichte, Hegel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 138–39, 155.

7. There is, with regard to this point, an important difference between Hegel’s own lecture outlines and the editorial additions (*Zusätze*) based on notes from some of his students. According to the student notes gathered by Boumann, Hegel places the intelligence’s symbolizing capacity on the highest level of the imagination, which he calls “the symbolizing, and sign-making imagination” (*die symbolisierende und die zeichen-machende Phantasie*) (*ENZ III*, §455, *Zus.*). This discrepancy opens the question as to whether the act of symbolizing is a mere synthesis or a truly creative act, and correspondingly, whether the movement from symbol to sign parallels the movement from associative to creative imagination or takes place within creative imagination. Although the student notes are useful as an expansion of Hegel’s position, when they contradict Hegel’s own notes, priority must be given to the latter. Hegel’s own outline as well as some of the notes from other students strongly indicate that the transition from the symbol to the sign parallels the transition from the associating to the creative imagination.

8. As Willem DeVries notes, the transition from the symbol to the sign corresponds to the transition from the subjective awareness of an identification between meaning and expression to an objective or intersubjective agreement upon a law of association. He explains, “the existence of a particular sign-signified relation depends on its having become a rule, an objective fact, that the two are correlated.” Willem DeVries, *Hegel’s Theory of Mental Activity* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press 1988), p. 145.

9. Jacques Derrida, “The Pit and the Pyramid: Introduction to Hegel’s Semiology,” in *Margins of Philosophy* trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 78.

10. Theodor Bodammer, *Hegels Deutung der Sprache* (Hamburg: F. Meiner, 1969), pp. 20–21, 64.

11. Daniel Cook emphasizes this point as well in *Language in the Philosophy of Hegel* (The Hague: Mouton, 1973), p. 50.

12. Josef Simon, *Das Problem der Sprache bei Hegel* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1966), pp. 251–52, 246. Simon also suggests that language conditions our experience of the absolute while it necessarily causes a “distortion” (*Verstellung*) (Simon, pp. 2–6). While Simon correctly sees that finitude lies at the heart of the absolute’s infinity, his theory of “*Verstellung*” nevertheless implies a rift between the absolute and human knowledge of it which cannot be breached. As the succeeding chapters will show, however, Hegel at least claims to overcome this Kantian kind of limitation and conceives a (differentiated) unity of the finite and infinite, the human and divine.

13. Karl Löwith. “Hegel und die Sprache,” in *Sämtliche Schriften I, Mensch und Menschenwelt*, hrsg. von Klaus Stichweh (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1981), p. 381.

14. Daniel J. Cook, *Language in the Philosophy of Hegel* (The Hague: Mouton, 1973), especially pp. 25–37, 184.

15. Jacques Derrida, “The Pit and the Pyramid: Introduction to Hegel’s Semiology,” p. 96.

16. David Farrell Krell. “Of Pits and Pyramids: Hegel on Memory, Remembrance, and Writing,” p. 220.

17. The context makes it clear that Hegel is referring to the symbol here in its particular distinction from the sign. Immediately before the statement just quoted, Hegel claims that symbolization “belongs to the poetic imagination (*Phantasie*), art in general,” (*Phil G*, p. 207).

18. This is my, and not Petry’s, translation. This passage derives from the Griesheim Ms., pp. 356–61, material not published by Boumann. Here Hegel does go on to say that as a language matures, these symbolic connections are “lost” and the word is used as a sign.

19. Frank Schalow, “The Question of Being and the Recovery of Language within Hegelian Thought,” *The Owl of Minerva* 24, 2 (Spring 1993), p. 179.



20. There has been a tremendous amount of debate regarding the relation of language to thought in Hegel's philosophy. In "Absolute Reflexion und Sprache," in *Natur und Geschichte* (Stuttgart, W. Kohlhammer, 1967), Werner Marx establishes what may be considered the standard interpretation, suggesting that there is both an identity and a difference between language and thought, but that this difference "disappears" because language turns out in the end to be the mere "servant" of thought for Hegel. See esp. pp. 253–53. In *The Company of Words: Hegel, Language, and Systematic Philosophy* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993), John McCumber identifies language with the whole of the Hegelian dialectic, claiming for example that Hegel's system is only " 'about' its own language" and that "Hegel holds that all philosophical problems are problems of language" pp. 19–20. Malcolm Clark agrees that there is a basic kind of identity between thought and language but suggests there is a necessary difference as well: "Thought," he says, "must be expressed, but expressed thought is thought that is self-critical in its expression." "For thought comes to be only in a language which it forms or creates as its embodiment, but which nevertheless opposes it in the very achievement of this incarnation." See *Logic and System: A Study of the Transition from 'Vorstellung' to Thought in the Philosophy of Hegel* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971), pp. 66, 68. Bodammer criticizes those who associate language too closely with dialectic as well as those who understand the sign to be the essence of Hegel's philosophy of language. Theodor Bodammer, *Hegels Deutung der Sprache* (Hamburg: F. Meiner, 1969). Finally, Gadamer also believes that for Hegel language mediates thought through both an identity to and a difference from it. He maintains, however, that the difference between thought and language has serious consequences for his logic. See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Hegels Dialektik* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1971).

21. Donald Phillip Verene, *Hegel's Recollection: A Study of Images in the 'Phenomenology of Spirit,'* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1985).

22. Jacques Derrida, "The Pit and the Pyramid: Introduction to Hegel's Semiology," p. 107.

23. Hegel insists, however, that this loss of determinacy has nothing to do with a lack intrinsic to words; it is simply thought's failure to concentrate on the meanings attached to the words: "Of course one can throw words around (*mit Worten herumschlagen*)

without grasping the [real] thing [or matter at hand] (*ohne die Sache zu erfassen*). This is however not the fault of words, but that of an inadequate, indeterminate, contentless thought" (*ENZ III*, §462, Zus.).

24. Stephen Houlgate, "Hegel, Derrida, and Restricted Economy: The Case of Mechanical Memory," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 34, 1 (January 1996), p. 87. Houlgate emphasizes that mechanical memory constitutes *a loss of meaning*, and he contends against Derrida that what spirit gains through this exercise is not the mere *anticipated* return on an investment, but something it was not even capable of *imagining* before it let go of its previous self-conception, namely, the activity of *thought*.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 88. Houlgate quotes Derrida's "The Pit and the Pyramid: Introduction to Hegel's Semiology," p. 107.

26. As M. J. Petry explains, Hegel's philosophy of theoretical spirit does not deny that there may be "disparities between intuition and recollection, reason and language, being and thought." Indeed, as Petry points out, Hegel acknowledges such discrepancies in his discussions of "dreams (§405)," "mental derangement (§408)" and "sensuous consciousness" (§§418–19). The point is that when these discrepancies occur they are not matters of theoretical spirit, but rather matters that must "be considered in anthropological or phenomenological and not in psychological terms." (Petry, ed., *Hegel's Philosophy of Subjective Spirit*, p. 390, notes 103, 26.).

27. Jacques Derrida, "Tympan," in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. xiv. As we saw in the introduction, Derrida himself concedes that there can be in principle no way of naming an absolute other or articulating it in terms of meaning because this would be to let it be mediated or appropriated by spirit. See Derrida's "From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism without Reserve," in *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 256, 259, 263.

## Chapter Three

1. See "A Note on the Textual Sources for an explanation of the textual editions used.

2. For Hegel art's "idea" and its "ideal" are closely related but not synonymous terms. The "idea" (*Idee*) of fine art is not the logical idea but the idea in unity with reality (*Wirklichkeit*), that is, in an individual, appearing (*erscheinende*) form. When this form is adequate to its idea, art's ideal (*Ideal*) is attained (*Ä I*, p. 104).

3. Most of Hegel's contemporaries who contemplated the questions of aesthetics understood art to be symbolic, at least in its ideal form. Though they sometimes differed as to whether art's symbolic function occurs through the natural characteristics of the work's immediate presence or through an arbitrarily imposed attribution, they tended to agree that art's finite sensuous presence serves to symbolize a general or "infinite" idea. Goethe, Meyer, Humboldt, Creuzer, for example, each maintained that the plastic arts are at their best when their concrete, sensible forms express corresponding ideas. See Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Über die Gegenstände der bildenden Kunst* (1797), in *Sämtliche Werke*, Jubiläumsausgabe Band 33 (Stuttgart, 1903), pp. 93–94; Henrich Meyer, *Über die Gegenstände der bildenden Kunst* (1798), in *Kleine Schriften zur Kunst, Deutsche Literaturdenkmale des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts*, Band 25 (Heilbronn, 1884), pp. 3–44; Wilhelm von Humboldt, *Brief an Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi* (1808), in *Briefe von Wilhelm von Humboldt an Fr. H. Jacobi*, hrsg. von A. Leitzmann (Halle, 1892), pp. 77–78; and Friedrich Creuzer, *Symbolik und Mythologie der Alten Völker*, Band I (1810), (Leipzig, 1819), pp. 62–85. Placing a particular emphasis on the art of poetry, A. W. Schlegel characterized it as "nothing other than an eternal symbolizing." A. W. Schlegel, *Vorlesungen über schöne Literatur und Kunst*, (1801–1804), in *Deutsche Literaturdenkmale des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts*, Band 17 (Heilbronn, 1884), pp. 90–93. Schelling understood art as symbolically unifying the general and the particular, and Friedrich Schlegel insisted that the essence of art is the meaning or thought it conveys, asserting unequivocally that "all art is symbolic." See Schelling's *Philosophie der Kunst* (1802), Zweiter Abschnitt, §39, in *Texte zur Philosophie der Kunst* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1982), pp. 191–99 and F. Schlegel's *Philosophie des Lebens*, (1827) in *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*, Band X (München, 1969), p. 232. For an excellent compilation and commentary on texts of this period that refer to the symbol, see Bengt Algot Sörenson's *Allegorie und Symbol: Texte zur Theorie des dichterischen Bildes im 18. und frühen 19. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt a. Main: Athenäum, 1972).

4. In Hegel's system spirit's conceptual development coincides with its concrete historical progression through these three general art forms as well as through the particular arts of architecture, sculpture, painting, music, and poetry. Here we will focus on the development of spirit through the three forms of art and will treat Hegel's analysis of the particular arts only in so far as it pertains to this formal development.

5. See the last section of this chapter for a discussion of the so-called "end of art" thesis in Hegel.

6. In the recently edited 1823 Hotho notes, the same point is expressed in further detail. There it becomes clear that the sensuous element of art is necessary to spirit's full expression and self-differentiation: "The appearance (*Schein*) is not an inessential, but rather an essential moment of the essence itself. The true is in spirit for itself, appears in itself, is there for others (*ist da für Andere*). There can be a difference therefore only in the kind of appearance; the material of existence (*des Daseins*) can thus only make the difference" (VPK 1823, p. 2).

7. Stephen Houlgate emphasizes this point in his *Freedom, Truth, and History: An Introduction to Hegel's Philosophy* (London: Routledge, Chapman, and Hall, Inc.), 1991.

8. According to M. J. Petry, Hegel's lecture notes suggest that his discussion of art in this section of the psychology extended beyond what Boumann's notes indicate. M. J. Petry, ed., *Hegel's Philosophy of Subjective Spirit* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1978), p. 412, note 171, 9.

9. Paul de Man, "Sign and Symbol in Hegel's Aesthetics," *Critical Inquiry* 8 (Summer 1982), p. 763.

10. Ibid., p. 763.

11. Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 473.

12. Contemporary historiography contests this assumption. According to *The Cambridge History of Iran*, the ancient Zoroastrians even had words that correspond to this distinction and may be translated in English as "tangible" and "intangible." M. Schwartz, "The Old Eastern Iranian World View According to the Avesta," in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 2, ed. Ilya Gershevitch (London: Cambridge University Press), 1985, pp. 640–43.)

13. In fact, these forms are neither as vague nor as confused as Hegel assumes. While Hegel is correct to note that Hindu art tends to present the human body in “distorted” forms (i.e., with several heads or hands, etc.), he is wrong to assume that it does so without concrete rational design. The four arms with which the god Siva is usually portrayed, for example, symbolize specific aspects of his personality. See the *Asiatic Mythology*, ed. J. Hackin, et al. (London: George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd., 1963), pp. 117–27.

14. Emil L. Fackenheim refutes Hegel’s characterization of Judaism with regard to this and other points. See “Hegel and Judaism: A Flaw in the Hegelian Mediation,” in *The Legacy of Hegel* (Proceedings of the Marquette Hegel Symposium 1970), ed. J. J. O’Malley, et al. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973).

15. It is interesting to note that in his 1820/21 lectures on aesthetics, Hegel placed Hebrew and Arabic art under the rubric of classical art, characterizing them as “classical sublimity” and distinguishing them from Greek “classical beauty” (VÄ 1820/21, pp. 139–45).

16. At one point Hegel acknowledges the difficulty in determining how much of the symbolic art’s “lack” derives from inadequate technical skill and how much from an insufficient grasp of the idea (Ä I, p. 400). He focuses, however, on the differences which derive from content, form, and their relation.

17. Hegel is not consistent on this point, however. In his anthropology he suggests that “The speaking mouth” and “the working hand,” for example, symbolize spirit’s productive activity because they illustrate the body’s capacity to do the work of spirit (ENZ III, §401, Zus.; see also PG, pp. 234–35).

18. Hegel admits, of course, that in the classical art of Greece there is still “a certain worshipping of the animalistic,” and that animals are sometimes even understood as communicating a divine revelation. However, he considers this positive disposition toward the spiritual value of animals a relatively insignificant detail in comparison to the general classical tendency to denigrate animals with respect to human beings. Here Hegel cites the Greek practice of the sacrifice and eating of animals, a practice said to be sanctioned by Zeus’s legendary choice to leave animal flesh for humans to eat (Ä II, pp. 36–37; see also Ä II, 38–45).

19. Interestingly, however, as Jeong-Im Kwon points out, Hegel characterizes Greek art and mythology as symbolic in his earlier writings. It is only later in his *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik* that he breaks from this conception (inherited from Creuzer and Schelling) and asserts a distinction between symbolic and Greek art. Jeong-Im Kwon, "Die Metamorphosen der 'Symbolischen Kunstform': Zur Rehabilitierung der ästhetischen Argumente Hegels," *Hegel-Studien*, Beiheft 34 (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1992). See this article for other points of development throughout the various years in which Hegel lectured on aesthetics.

20. Friedrich Creuzer, *Symbolik und Mythologie der alten Völker* (1810) (Leipzig, 1819).

21. Here Hegel follows the prescripts of Winckelmann, *Werke*, 9 Bde., (Dresden, 1808–20).

22. Taylor, *Hegel*, p. 478.

23. Rüdiger Bubner, "Über einige Bedingungen gegenwärtiger Ästhetik," *Neue Hefte für Philosophie* 5 (1973).

24. Hermann Glockner, "Die Ästhetik in Hegels System," in *Hegel-Studien*, Beiheft 2 (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1965).

25. Karsten Harries, "Hegel on the Future of Art," *Review of Metaphysics* 27 (1973–74).

26. Dieter Henrich, "Zur Aktualität von Hegels Ästhetik," in *Stuttgarter Hegel-Tage 1970*, hrsg. von Hans-Georg Gadamer, in *Hegel-Studien*, Beiheft 11 (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1974).

27. Theodor Litt, *Hegel—Versuch einer kritischen Erneuerung* (Heidelberg, 1953).

28. Kuhn, Helmut, "Die Gegenwärtigkeit der Kunst nach Hegels Vorlesungen über Ästhetik," in *Stuttgarter Hegel-Tage 1970*, hrsg. von Hans-Georg Gadamer, in *Hegel-Studien*, Beiheft 11 (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1974). Helmut Kuhn accepts Hegel's intention to declare the end of art, but asserts that Hegel's other texts contradict this thesis. Kuhn suggests, for example, that Hegel's placing of art before religion contradicts Hegel's own awareness that art *arises out of* religion.

29. Willi Oelmüller, "Hegels Satz vom Ende der Kunst und das Problem der Philosophie der Kunst nach Hegel," *Philosophisches Jahrbuch* 73 (1965).

30. Gerd Wolandt, "Standpunkte der Kunstphilosophie," in *Die Aktualität der Transzendental-philosophie—Hans Wagner zum 60. Geburtstag*, hrsg. von Schmidt and Wolandt (Bonn, 1977).

31. Annemarie Gethmann-Siefert, "Eine Diskussion ohne Ende: zu Hegels These vom Ende der Kunst," in *Hegel-Studien*, Band 16 (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1981). In the course of her article, Gethmann-Siefert criticizes the contributors to the American Hegel Society Colloquium on Hegel's Art and Logic and its publication *Art and Logic in Hegel's Philosophy*, ed. Warren Steinkraus and Kenneth I. Schmitz (New York, 1980) for dismissing the thesis of the end of art simply on the basis of the Hotho edition of Hegel's works. However, in a more recent article, Gethmann-Siefert herself argues that there is much evidence in Hegel's own text against the end of art thesis ("Hegel über Kunst und Alltäglichkeit: Zur Rehabilitierung der schönen Kunst und des ästhetischen Genusses," in *Hegel-Studien*, Band 28 [Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1993]).

32. Stephen Bungay, *Beauty and Truth: A Study of Hegel's Aesthetics* (Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 71–89, especially pp. 71–72).

33. Andreas Grossmann, *Spur zum Heiligen: Kunst und Geschichte im Widerstand zwischen Hegel und Heidegger*, in *Hegel Studien*, Beiheft 36 (Bonn: Bouvier, 1996), p. 50.

34. Grossman quotes Walter Jaeschke, *Kunst und Religion*, in F. W. Graf / F. Wagner (Hg.), *Die Flucht in den Begriff: Materialien zu Hegels Religionsphilosophie* (Stuttgart 1982), 163 ff., hier 173.

35. Klaus Hast, *Hegels Ästhetische Reflexion des freien Subjekts: Der Satz von Ende der Kunst im Lichts eines vernachlässigten Aspekts* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1991).

36. Of course, the English word 'end' contains an ambiguity in that it can mean 'telos' or fulfillment as well as death or demise. Ironically (since Hegel did not write in English) interpretations that acknowledge this ambiguity come much closer to Hegel's meaning than those who focus on the mere negativity of the movement. William Desmond points out the ambiguity of the 'death' of art exceptionally well: "But the 'death' of art must be understood in accordance with the peculiar philosophical fashion in which Hegel understands death: not as sheer negation but as negation

which is in turn negated and transmuted into affirmation." William Desmond, *Art and the Absolute: A Study of Hegel's Aesthetics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), p. 12. See also Werner Hamacher's "(The End of Art with the Mask)," in *Hegel After Derrida* (London: Routledge, 1998).

37. Bungay, *Beauty and Truth: A Study of Hegel's Aesthetics*, p. 71. Through Herman Weisse, Bungay traces the origin of this expression back to the students who heard Hegel's lectures, p. 71. (Cf. Christian Hermann Weisse, "Review of Hegel's *Aesthetics*," in *Hallische Jahrbücher für Wissenschaft und Kritik* 1–7 (September, 1838).

38. William Desmond, *Art and the Absolute: A Study of Hegel's Aesthetics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), pp. xi–xx.

39. Bungay, *Beauty and Truth: A Study of Hegel's Aesthetics*, pp. 29–30, 36.

40. Houlgate, *Freedom, Truth, and History: An Introduction to Hegel's Philosophy*, p. 129. The fact that art is the sensuous "appearance" of truth, rather than its logical exposition does not gainsay its truth value for Hegel. As we have seen, for Hegel, spirit's appearance is essential to its truth (*Ä I*, pp. 21, 8).

41. Stephen Houlgate, "Hegel and the 'End' of Art," *The Owl of Minerva* 29, 1 (Fall 1997), p. 2.

## Chapter Four

1. See "A Note on the Textual Sources" for an explanation of the textual editions used.

2. In his *Beauty and Truth: A Study of Hegel's Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984) Stephen Bungay argues that the association of religion with representation fails to distinguish it from art, since literature is also defined as representation. However, as this chapter and the previous one show, Hegel clearly distinguishes between religion and art, even though he acknowledges that in some religions the religious and aesthetic moments are very close. As is the case with other art forms, a piece of literature may be viewed both in terms of art and in terms of religion. As art, it is spirit's manifestation in the sensuous form of the



word and the voice; as religion, it is the medium through which spirit contacts itself in other forms of self-consciousness.

3. Quentin Lauer, *Hegel's Concept of God* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982).

4. Cyril O'Regan, *The Heterodox Hegel* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).

5. Hegel follows Schelling in his association of religious consciousness with the imagination. For a development of the concept of the imagination from Kant through Fichte and Schelling to Hegel, see the first part of Louis Dupre's "Religion as Representation," in *The Legacy of Hegel* (Proceedings of the Marquette Hegel Symposium, 1970), ed. J. J. O'Malley, et al (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973); and John Sallis's *Spacings—of Reason and Imagination in the Texts of Kant, Fichte, and Hegel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

6. As Hegel argues in his *Science of Logic*, from a speculative point of view, every statement or principle has a limited truth value (*WL I*, p. 52, 168; *WL II*, p. 76).

7. During the time Hegel lectured on the philosophy of religion, he changed his mind in regard to the order of this spiritual development in religion. Where discrepancies arise, I follow the development he presents in his 1827 lectures, the last lecture series from which we have a complete set of student notes. It is significant to note, however, that in his 1824 lectures, he placed Greek religion after Jewish religion.

8. As Helmuth von Glasenapp has pointed out in *Das Indienbild deutscher Denker* (Stuttgart, 1960), p. 54, Hegel's interpretation does not do justice to the great diversity of traditions within Hinduism. Hegel focuses primarily on the later, Brahmanistic Hinduism and disregards the long history of Hinduism that goes back to Vedic writings. Clark Butler tries to defend Hegel on this point, noting that none of the scholarship of Hegel's time took account of this distinction and suggesting that Brahmanism "is in fact the decisive element of Hinduism," (*G.W.F. Hegel* [Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1977], pp. 51–52, 61). Butler's argument, however, is inconclusive, and the accuracy of Hegel's interpretation of the Hinduism remains highly questionable. Butler is correct to suggest, however, that Hegel's critique of Hinduism may be interpreted as an indirect criticism of

German Romanticism, which was highly fascinated by Indian culture (*ibid.*, p. 53).

9. See footnote number 7, above.

10. According to Emil L. Fackenheim, Hegel's interpretation of Judaism "is totally at odds with the Biblical sources," as well as the self-understanding of the average Jewish person ("Hegel and Judaism: A Flaw in the Hegelian Mediation," in *The Legacy of Hegel* [Proceedings of the Marquette Hegel Symposium 1970], ed. J. J. O'Malley et al. [The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973], p. 172). As Fackenheim insists, the Jewish religion actually expresses and enacts a very positive relation between the human and the divine.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 169.

12. This formulation is not meant to imply that subjectivity belongs only to human consciousness and not to the divine, for Hegel clearly views the divine as subjective and human existence as objectively real. The point here is that both sides of both oppositions (the human vs. the divine, the subjective vs. the objective) are united.

13. Hegel does not explicitly deny that this supersession through worship could also occur in "finite" religions, but his discussion of this possibility in the beginning of the section on absolute religion implies that he sees it as occurring only there. His insistence that religious rituals need corresponding conceptions suggests the view that the forms of representation which underlie specific devotional practices have a determinate effect on the result of that practice.

14. For the sake of simplicity, I adopt Hegel's association of God with the male pronoun, though I do not endorse this association. Interestingly, Hegel seems to imply here that this association is itself an accidental one, though he certainly never considers this possibility explicitly.

15. Cyril O'Regan, *The Heterodox Hegel*, pp. 109–10.

16. Hegel criticizes the Catholic view for fixating on the actual being of Christ and subsequently the Church instead of recognizing the spirit to be in the community (*VPR II-s*, p. 301).

17. Yerkes, James, *The Christology of Hegel* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983).

18. Lauer, Quentin, *Hegel's Concept of God*, pp. 35, 30.

19. Ibid., pp. 38, 42.

20. It is true that Hegel's sometimes equates "God" with "spirit," but he conceives of God as intrinsically human and manifested in the person of Jesus.

21. Cyril O'Regan, *The Heterodox Hegel*, pp. 332, 336.

22. Ibid., pp. 339–63.

23. I have articulated this relation in detail in my essay, "Hegel and the Problem of Social Integration: Toward a Postmodern *Sittlichkeit*," in *Hegel Jahrbuch: XXII Hegel Kongreß* (Meisenheim: Hain [forthcoming]).

## Chapter Five

1. See also *ENZ*.I, §172A; §172, Zusatz; §213, Zusatz; §214A.

2. Malcolm Clark, *Logic and System: A Study of the Transition from 'Vorstellung' to Thought in the Philosophy of Hegel* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971), p. 40.

3. Ibid., p. 35.

4. I refer the reader again to Donald Phillip Verene's excellent study, *Hegel's Recollection: A Study of Images in the 'Phenomenology of Spirit'* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press), 1985.

5. Lu De Vos, "Gott oder die absolute Idee: Zum Thema der Hegelschen Religionsphilosophie," in *Hegel Studien*. Band 29 (Bonn: Bouvier, 1994), especially p. 116.)

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# HEGEL AND THE SYMBOLIC MEDIATION OF SPIRIT

*Kathleen Dow Magnus*

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